



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

"Story of a Girl"







600060382P

STORY OF A SIN.

A Sketch.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "CHERRY RIPE," "THE TOKEN OF THE
SILVER LILY," "LAND O' THE LEAL," "AS HE COMES UP
THE STAIR," AND "MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

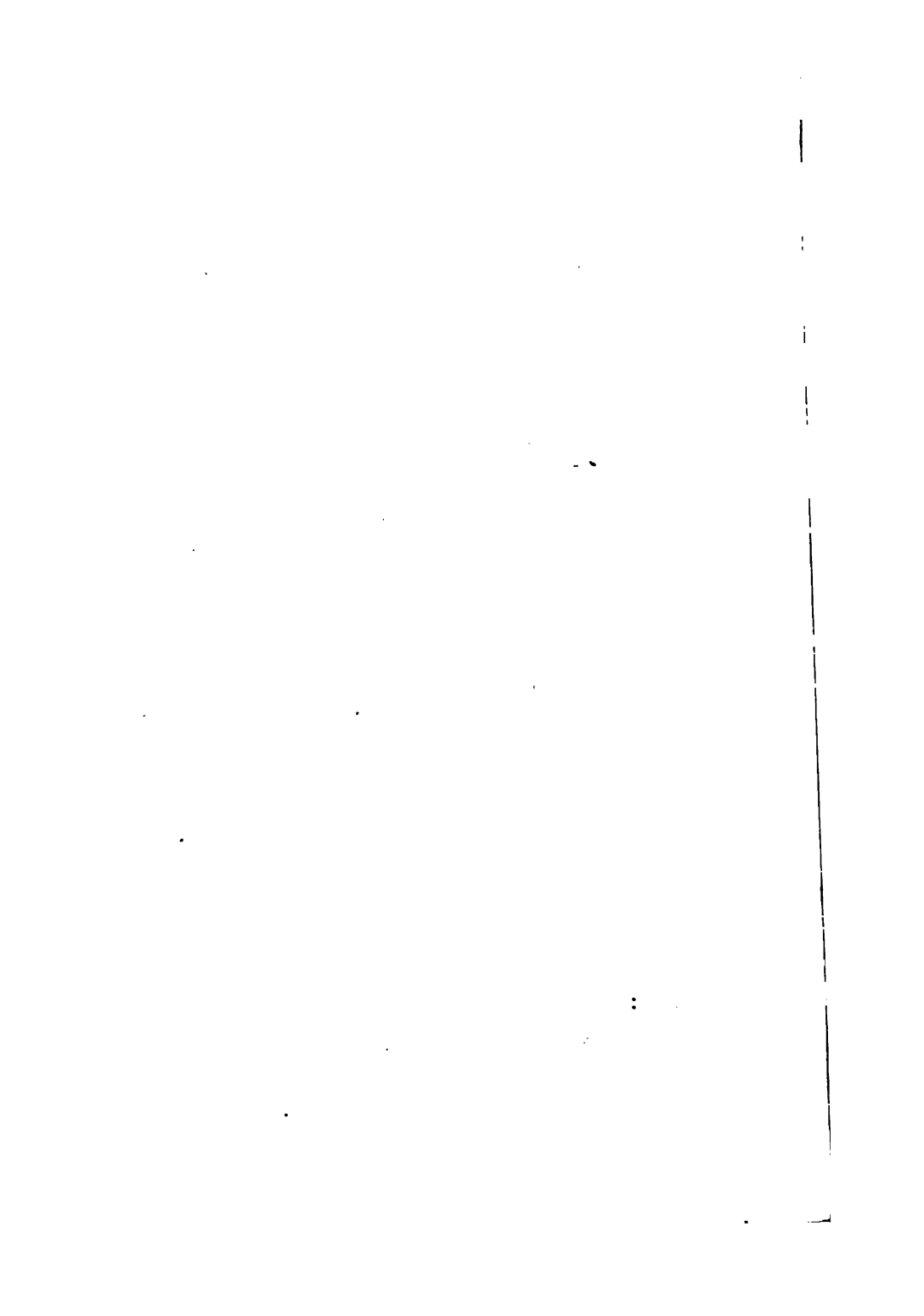


LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED,
HENRIETTA STREET.

1882.

[All Rights Reserved.]

251. i. 622.



STORY OF A SIN.

BOOK II.

REAPED.

CHAPTER XII.—*Continued.*

“SOMEHOW,” she went on gently,
“things are so clear to me to-night
—as though I had got out into a purer
air, and it was easy to see things as
they really are. I know now that I
need not have been miserable about the
Duchess, and I was wicked towards

you. But that's all over now only you'll remember some day that I told you so. And you've made me very happy, Frank—and Dody loves you."

"God bless you, Madcap!" he said, and kissed her hand, feeling that she had given him the crown, the reward of his long faithfulness to her. But someone outside, who did not hear the words spoken, leaned forward and looked after the young pair as they moved from the window back into the room.

She tried one of the two doors that communicated with the library. It was locked, and though she called to him, Mr. Eyre did not reply.

"I am tired," she said to Frank, "and will leave you now. You will wait a little while for him?"

Frank said that he would ; and having bid each other " Good-night," she turned at the foot of the stairs to look back and smile.

So he saw her for the last time in life so for sixteen long years he remembered her the sweet little tyrant of his youth, the early love of his manhood—Madcap Madcap

CHAPTER XIII.

Be pitiful, O God!

FRANK, left alone, sat down by Mad-cap's little table, all thought of Mr. Eyre gone in the delight that her words had given him.

"You have made me very happy," she had said, and more than that he could not have done, even to giving her up his life, and to-night it seemed to him a very little thing that he had taken upon himself, and the reward out of all proportion to the sacrifice.

His thoughts went back to that day in the copse, when she had known her one

short, sharp, bitter space of misery—misery so quickly turned to joy as to be over almost before she had tasted it; and if afterwards she had sorrowed for Hester's sake, and his sin, that sorrow had touched no vital part of her life, and she was Madcap still, in her brightness, innocence, and youth, as she should always be in heart so long as he lived to guard her. And this presentiment, though scarcely of evil, that seemed to possess her to-night, meant nothing; it was only a passing mood, and to-morrow she would be as bright as she had been that morning. And then his thoughts travelled back over the day that had begun happily by his meeting her with the boys in the village, and he had persuaded her to go with him to see a

pretty sight that he had chanced upon an hour before.

It was no less than a group of three young chestnuts that had burst out in a complete new suit of leaves and flowers, affording a marked contrast to the russet-brown matrons standing by, who had an air of by no means approving of such out-of-season frivolity.

They had stood silent before the curious and beautiful sight, then Madcap, looking up with something very sweet and solemn in her face, had said to him, "Frank, don't these trees make you think of a human life in more ways than one? of a life that has been happy, and all at once trouble came to it, and stripped it of everything—just as the chaffers came in spring and destroyed

the leaves of these trees—leaving them bare when those around were beautiful and happy ; but now, in autumn, just when all the others are sober and dull, these have their youth renewed, just as that life might be even more beautiful and happy in its autumn than its spring.”

“But there are some lives, as there are certain trees, that cannot be so renewed,” Frank had said sadly ; “once stripped of happiness, the heart never stirs in them again, and after all these seem to me the grandest trees, the noblest hearts.”

“No!” Madcap had cried ; “that which has once loved for love’s sake, been happy for another’s sake, may have thought it has lost all, but yet carries

in itself the power to produce as beautiful fruit as any that have gone before, and a second youth is possible as to that tree which has so boldly reversed the edict of fate."

But Frank had shaken his head; there could be no second Madcap to him in the world.

And then they had stood still to watch the children go down the glade, dancing over the yellow leaves with feet as light as the hearts that winged them, and no instinct told the mother that this was the last time the little brothers would pass that way—the last time her eyes would follow them.

He wished now that he had gone all the way home with her, and so have averted that meeting which he feared

had taken place, and that accounted for the excitation of mood Mr. Eyre had displayed that night. To Frank it was a lamentable failing in that strong mind, the incessant fear of what Hester might say or do ; but he forgot that Mr. Eyre had only seen her in those fiercer moods when anger had swayed her, or when that mad, reckless determination to move him, that will often make a woman wilfully degrade herself in a man's eyes, had carried her beyond both truth and honour. And to-night all his sleeping dread of that catastrophe to which he had feared Mr. Eyre's violence of hatred might impel him, was once more awakened. This lethargy that Mr. Eyre had thought to mean decay, Frank knew to be natural as the snow-wreath that covers the earth,

while, beneath it, busy life is at work, silently preparing its forces against the coming struggle; for even inanimate creation, as in our insolence we term it, does not achieve existence at a leap; and while brain and heart rested sluggishly, Mr. Eyre's strength was secretly renewing itself, whether for good or evil. The Necessarian, in effect, says, "Given the whole of the antecedents, the action can be predicted." The Fatalist adds, that the man himself has nothing to do with the antecedents. Democritus teaches that chance is at the bottom of all things, and so reduces life—all things—to very barren issues; not strength, truth, courage, nor ability, winning the race, but *chance*. And Frank wondered if this same chance had taken Mr. Eyre to Synge Lane that

night; but the thought was too horrible to be pursued; and Frank, pacing the room restlessly, longed for the library door to open, and his host come out to reassure him.

But Mr. Eyre, sunk deep in slumber, with the pen in his hand, could not have awakened if he would, so powerfully in a species of nightmare was he held; and when Frank, after restlessly waiting another half-hour, tried the door, and found it still locked, he resolved to wait no longer, for he had an errand to perform that night, and would feel no peace till it was accomplished. Half-past eleven struck as he closed the hall-door behind him, and at the same moment saw a black shadow flit across the courtyard, and disappear at the

foot of the stone steps that led to the nursery.

“Hester!” he exclaimed aloud, with a sensation of intense relief that surprised himself; and as he passed below Madcap’s window he paused and looked up at the light in it, and blessed her, and thanked God as for one who has just been delivered from peril.

A faint light issued from the room in which Mr. Eyre sat, and between the blind and the window-frame Frank caught a glimpse of him sound asleep at his table, his head sunk on the out-stretched arms, a pen still grasped by his fingers.

In turning away, Frank struck his foot against a ladder placed against the wall, but of this he thought nothing,

and in a few moments had mounted the stone steps, and found, as he expected, the outer door ajar. He entered, but not so quickly but that warning was given of his approach. As he gently pushed the nursery door open, a woman stole behind the half-open door of a linen-press, and stood there trembling, believing the new-comer to be Mr. Eyre.

Dody lay tossing on his bed, and Frank's heart contracted with a bitter pang as he looked down on his darling, who in dreamland clutched fast the pillow that represented to him his "mummy." Frank had been able to avert one sorrow from Madcap, but he knew that he could not avert this one; nothing short of a miracle would ever rear Dody to manhood now. The

fatal cold caught on the spring morning when he had stolen out to gather that birthday flower, had taken fast hold upon him, and the beautiful little body in which the lamp of health appeared to burn so brilliantly, was already fevered and weakened by hidden mischief.

An inner door opened, and Josephine entered, starting back in genuine amazement at sight of Frank.

"Mrs. Clarke is here," he said, approaching her. "I saw her enter," he added, as Josephine held up her hands and eyes in contradiction, and called upon heaven and earth to witness that there was not a soul there save the children and their two selves.

"And the door that I found open," he said, "how is that?"

The woman gave him an inscrutable look from under her long lashes—how many nights had she not thus left it on the latch—then as he still looked at her, she shrugged her shoulders.

“The diamonds dazzled me,” she said; “it was in thinking of them that I forgot the door. Ah! *mon Dieu!*” and she clasped her hands, “a man might die, commit a murder for a necklace like that”—perhaps it was of such a keepsake Mr. Digges had been thinking, when he had promised her—poor stupid fool that he was—anything if she would be his wife!

Frank smiled at the thought of the brilliant Frenchwoman as plain Mrs. Digges, but the thought did not cross his mind, as it would inevitably have

.

done Mr. Eyre's, how in this stolid, stupid man's passion for the unprincipled woman lay the elements of a crime. He was thinking of Hester, and as certain that she was in the house, as that Josephine was ignorant of her presence.

He advanced to the inner room, followed by the nurse, and as they disappeared, a figure stole from its hiding-place, and with one rapid, passionate kiss on Dody's brow, passed out and down the stone steps.

CHAPTER XIV.

What ho ! Murder !

THE night, its stillness, its peace, was suddenly rent in twain by a shriek so savage, so awful, that it drove the blood curdling round the hearts of those who heard, and for one helpless moment rooted them to the ground on which they stood, while their flesh crept, awaiting it knew not what.

Frank recovered himself first, instinct causing him to connect that cry with Madcap, though the voice was not hers ; and scarce knowing where he went, he ran like one mad out of the nursery

and along the corridors, till he reached the opposite wing, where, attracted by the light shining through a half-open door, he pushed it wide, and stood trying to collect his senses, endeavouring to grasp the scene upon which he gazed.

In an arm-chair, drawn close to the window, sat Madcap, to all appearance dead, her white wrapper all disordered and stained with blood, while Mr. Eyre, standing beside her, held his handkerchief to her side, and on seeing Frank, made a gesture to him to approach.

He was still in evening dress, and no speck of blood was about him save on his hands, which were deeply dyed from the office he filled; but his voice was steady as usual when he asked Frank

to ride at once to Marmiton, and fetch a doctor.

“Not one of these fools could saddle a horse,” he added, with a look of scorn towards the servants who had hastened on Frank’s heels, and now crowded together, sobbing, crying, stumbling, Josephine alone preserving her self-control.

It was she who was the first to observe that the window was open; she who cried out, after a hurried glance round, that the diamonds were gone; she who removed a little table from her mistress’s side that held a handkerchief, a book, and a few trifles, bringing in its place a heavier one, upon which she placed the medicine chest that Mr. Eyre bade her bring from his dressing-room.

But, alas! alas! poor Madcap! The

hand that did "medicine thee to that sweet sleep" could easier lay thee thus, still and silent, than rouse thee to life again; and as though conscious of the helplessness of his efforts, her husband suddenly ceased them, and carried her towards the bed, upon which she sank like snow.

As Mr. Eyre laid her down, he looked up. "Seize him!" he cried; and all eyes were turned to the window, through which a man's face peered — heavy, animal, fixed in a kind of fascination that held it motionless, when a dozen hands were stretched forth to grasp the man's shoulders, and prevent his escape.

"Poor wretch!" said Mr. Eyre contemptuously, as he recognised his gardener. "Let him go." But those who,

in their zeal, had already rushed round to the outside of the house, thought proper to secure him, so that he appeared to drop backwards from the window, and vanished in a yell of execration that made night hideous, and seemed an outrage on the quiet figure that lay as if asleep, each feature stilled to a peace that might not be rudely broken.

“Go!” said Mr. Eyre to the remaining men and women, and their habitual awe of him returned; they hurried on each other’s steps, and he was left alone with Madcap. He laid his lips to that little cruel rift in her side, he kissed her clay-cold mouth, and swore aloud that he would never rest till he had found her murderer, and delivered that murderer up to justice;

and then kneeling beside her, that beloved head on his shoulder, he listened for the sound of horses' feet that would herald a message of life or death. When we are at death's door, or in sore extremity, the man who has made the healing of the body his life's study, comes to us like an angel of light, and as God's representative we receive and honour him; but when he has carried us through the valley, we scarcely turn our heads to thank him, and he is forgotten till sharp necessity bids us again summon him to our aid.

To Mr. Eyre, the short stout man, who at the end of three-quarters of an hour entered, was endowed with supernatural powers, when after five minutes' patient application of certain remedies,

Madcap's eyes opened and looked into his.

And without, Frank leaned against the lintel, cold and sick, scarcely listening for any stir within, so sure was he that death was there; but as he so stood, something cold slipped itself into his hand, and looking down, he saw Dody in his nightgown beside him.

That terrible cry had awakened him as well as the rest of the house, though Doune had slept soundly through it; and finding that Josephine was not in the room, Dody had got out of his warm bed and trotted with bare feet down the gallery, secure of finding a haven with his mother when he reached her room. But frightened by the confusion, and fearing he would be caught and

carried back to bed, he had hidden behind a curtain, shivering with cold, until they had all gone, leaving the door shut.

He could not understand what they had been saying, but he knew that he should find mummy in there, only he had seen his father through the half-open door, and when the servants came out, he had not the courage to knock for admission.

As Frank took the little figure in his arms, trying to warm him and chafing those ice-cold feet, somehow he realised that no warmth could save him now—that death had struck Dody to the heart that night, even as it had struck his mother.

“Seep wiz mummy,” said Dody, as

he clasped his cold arms round Frank's neck, and even as he said it, fell sound asleep in the young fellow's arms, so that when Mr. Eyre came out to summon attendance for Madcap, the corridor was empty, Frank being then in the nursery.

The dining-room presented a strange scene. To one of the massive legs of the dining-table was firmly tied the man Digges, whose grimaces of fear as he looked round on his body-guard, furnished that element of the grotesque that is seldom absent in any real tragedy. His stupidity of countenance was in his favour; he seemed too utterly devoid of the courage to conceive, and the nerve to strike, that the deed entailed, though possibly a psychologist might have found in the man's brutish-

ness, all the elements of an accomplished murderer.

“Why couldn’t you fall in love with one of your own sort,” the cook was saying as the tears ran down her honest face, “and not take up with a bit of folly like that, as sets joolery a sight before vartue? ‘When you can give me dimonds like missuses, I’ll marry you,’ sez she, for I heard her; but oh, Lord! to think that you’ll hang for that wicked speech as put murder in your heart!”

“I never touched the dimonds,” said the man sullenly; “I only looked at ’em through the window”—then, seeing the change in the faces round, stuttered in his speech, still further deepening his fellow-servants’ conviction of his guilt.

Few of the usual traits of vulgar

curiosity and fear were visible among those present; intense grief for what had befallen an adored mistress, cast out the horror of the crime, and they thought less of the instrument, than of that young life now hovering between life and death overhead.

They knew that she lived—that she would probably live until her child was born, and then—and then . . . but if strong and earnest prayer put up by lips not used to pray might turn the balance by its urgency, then Madcap's feet would turn earthwards, and not towards those rushing waters that strike chill upon the feet of those that are fain to tarry on the shore.

As the night wore on, gradually the dining-room emptied of all save the

prisoner and the grey-haired butler, who sat by the open door, straining his ears for the first sound that should reach him from his mistress's chamber. The women crept as close to it as they dared, more than one feeling indignant that Josephine should be within.

But in the awful emergency of the night, the French girl's wit and resource had shown themselves in an extraordinary degree; it was on her more than Mr. Eyre, that the doctor relied at every turn; her head was cool, her hand steady as though nothing unusual had happened; even the room was restored to its usual order, and all traces of the cruel deed removed.

How did the night pass? Only when dawn came, it found Frank's broken heart

healed, for he had fallen asleep with his arms round Dody, and in his dreams Madcap had come to meet him, and kissed his cheek as in the old boy and girl days together, and he had told her with tears how he had dreamed that she was dead while she of whom he dreamed, and upon whose face the brightness of the golden city was already shining, with arms clasped round her husband's neck, was thanking God that He had brought her safely through the valley of the shadow of death.

CHAPTER XV.

*Sunrise was slanting o'er the city gates
Rosy and beautiful, and from the hills
The early risen poor were coming in. . . .*

DAY was breaking, not with foretaste of early winter, but vividly, like a page out of the missal of spring thrust in at hazard among the later chapters of the year. Madcap's heart swelled as she looked through the open window at the brightening sky beyond, then, as though the chillness of the morning had touched her, nestled closer to the shelter of Mr. Eyre's breast.

"One thinks of God first," she said,

as her hand stole up to her husband's neck, and rested there. "But now—now you've got two Madcaps, instead of one, to play tricks with you, and be jealous of you, and *love* you!"

She laughed out joyously as she said it; but something in the sound of her own voice startled her, and she clung more closely to Mr. Eyre.

"How weak it sounds," she said, with something like fear in her voice, "and I feel so strong and well; even that throbbing in my side has ceased . . . husband," she added, "could one dream a thing, and wake up to find it *real*? Last night I thought that I fell asleep in my chair, and was half wakened by a sudden blow. I struggled to speak, to cry out, but could not; and when I opened my

eyes you were bending over me, and there was a cruel pain *here* but after that I knew nothing till I woke with the cry of my little baby in my ears."

"And who would harm you, sweetheart?" said Mr. Eyre, as he wound his arm more closely about her side. "It was a bad dream; you'll forget it presently."

"It's forgotten now," she said, in that voice of pure joy, with that light on her face that each new motherhood brings to some happy few as though the mother-heart were born over again each time there comes a new claim upon it.

But Mr. Eyre saw not that brightness—his face hidden in her hair, he

was counting each breath she drew, knowing that each word she spoke, each weak pressure of the arm she gave him, carried her a step nearer to that unknown land to which, like a child ignorant of his destination, she was hurrying.

For Madcap was to be one of those who die "not knowing," who are gathered to their Father's bosom as children, the end of whose holiday is unlooked-for rest—who have been scared by no grisly tales on the way, and knowing no fear of their Father, greet Him as the friend of whom their mother's lips have taught them recognising Him with passionate love as the reverent instincts of their youth recur

Did Mr. Eyre add blackness to the
VOL. III. D

sin that had slain her, when he resolved that she should set out with no more knowledge of her journey's end, than of the deed that had sped her on her way ?

He it was who, with iron will, had taken matters into his own hand from the moment he had discovered the crime—he who had administered chloroform to her in the very instant of her return to consciousness, so that she had scarcely felt one pang ere sinking into oblivion ; and this he had done so ruthlessly, so entirely against the doctor's commands, that he had been warned by him that it would be murder if she died.

“ I will abide by the issue,” Mr. Eyre had said, and the whole night through never left her side, till with the struggling dawn had come a new life, and Madcap

had awakened to that ease of body that in cruelly hurt people so often precedes death.

If a pang seized his heart to think that somewhere she would awaken lonely, unprepared, not looking to the glory beyond, but backwards, stretching out her arms to those dear ones from whom she had set out with no word of parting, he put the thought by she had no sin to repent of—others could pray for her, and deep down in the man's stubborn heart struggled vague inarticulate cries it is by our human affections that we struggle up to those spiritual yearnings in which we recognise God.

"I'm so tired," she said, "but I don't want to fall asleep just yet it

seems almost wicked to be so perfectly happy, as if one must be paid out for it by-and-by there was only one little thing, and that has come straight too, just in time but I'll tell you about that when I wake up and you won't be angry with her any more. And you'll tell Frank how well I am, and how happy somehow I had an instinct last night, that something was going to happen I'm afraid my little baby won't be very strong at first," she added wistfully, "but we'll take such care of her—you and I—and you always thought you could love something that was like me!"

"How quiet you are," she said, after a little pause, in which the ecstasy of spirit that possessed her, rose higher;

“but you’ve had a long, trying night lay your head down on my shoulder, and we’ll both go to sleep but I should like to see the children first. . . .”

“They shall come presently,” he said, selfish in his love for her to the last, and grudging each priceless moment that was not given to himself.

“How fond they will be of her,” she said, a faint smile gathering on her beautiful, wan lips; “and when I get up, I shall be able to run about, and jump and play as I used to do when you called me your Madcap, and I’ll lead you many a dance yet”—the dimples showed in her white cheeks—“but you’ll catch me up, as you always did, however much I might seem to get ahead at first and Christmas is coming,

the happiest Christmas I shall ever have known. . . . ”

Would it be ? O, God ! if he could only be sure of that if he could only know that however miserable himself, somewhere she was happy his one earthly stake had been her happiness, and if he won that, at whatever cost to himself, he might surely be reckoned a man not worsted by fate, but victorious, since upon himself only fell the punishment of his sin.

“ I think I could sleep now,” she said ; and her voice was weaker than it had been a few minutes ago ; “ but you’ll call the children first ” then lay with her eyes fixed on the door, listening for the little footsteps that soon were heard approaching.

Dody came dancing in, half dressed, and ran to her, laughing; but Doune, who understood better, stood just within the threshold, his lip hanging, and his heart pierced by a trouble that he only vaguely understood.

Dody had climbed upon the bed, and thrown his arms round her neck, then crept under the coverlid, and drawing it up about his neck, tried to nestle to her side, and shut his eyes.

“Seep wiz mummy!” he said. “Is ’oo *quite* comf’ble?” he added, wishing that his father would take his arm away, and so let him creep the closelier to her side.

She pressed the little curly head to her bosom, and kissed it; then beckoned to Doune, who came slowly, and looking

at her with an earnestness that somehow threw a new light on his character, and made her kiss him all the more tenderly for the thought that hitherto she had undervalued his affection.

When Josephine had placed a little white bundle in her arms, she whispered to Mr. Eyre, "You'll kiss her first;" and this he did, but stooping his head in such fashion that she could not see his face, while on either side of her the little brothers gazed with awe on the mysterious atom that father had actually condescended to kiss.

"You've got a sister, my sweethearts," she said, as Dody came close, and looked in the tiny face that already seemed to have something of her own look; "and you'll love her, and be kind to her——"

But while Dody tried to take the baby out of Madcap's arms, Doune stood aloof, somehow convinced that it was the cause of his mother looking so sick and when her arms released their hold, and the two boys were led away, he was sure she must be very ill, or Dody's sobs would have wakened her.

She supposed that she must have fallen into a slumber, when after a space she awoke and found herself alone with Mr. Eyre, his arm still wound about her side, his head lying on her breast.

He asked if she were in any pain; but as the wife of Poëtus, who, with calm smile, and death-wounded heart, whispered to her lord, "Sweet, it hurts not," so Madcap, who knew no hurt,

laughed and answered, that she had never felt so well, or so supremely happy, as now then as a child who nestles itself closer to the bosom of its mother, too weary even to lift its lips for a good-night kiss, Madcap fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

*The corpse is calm below our knee,
The spirit bright above thee,
Between them worse than either, we
Without the rest and glory :
Be pitiful, O God !*

DODY and Doune had been kept close prisoners all the morning, and could not think why so many people kept coming and going, and why the villagers came to the door to sob and cry—Dody was sure they would disturb his mother, who was still asleep, they told him, and must not be wakened.

But in the servants' dinner-hour, he escaped into the garden, and there picked

as big a nosegay of flowers as he could find. He was some time choosing a handful to his taste, and wondered at his liberty as he ran hither and thither, till he had got it to his mind. Then he crept upstairs, and sat down outside his mother's door, waiting till she should wake up, and open it. He wished that he had not got such a dreadful pain in his chest—it made him cough, and he had been told to be very quiet; but presently he would see mummy, and she would take him in her arms, and she would kiss him, and then the pain would go quite away.

He waited patiently for awhile, then kneeled down; and putting his lips to the keyhole, said in a whisper—

“Mummy! mummy!” then, as he got

no reply, laid the bunch of flowers down on the threshold, and applying his two little hands to the lock, contrived to turn it, picked up his flowers, and went in.

The blinds were down, the room was in twilight. All looked cold and strange that shrouded outline on the bed was strangest of all that was not mummy he would go downstairs and look for her.

As he ran out of the room, his face bright with the thought that he would so soon see her, he saw Frank approaching, and flew to meet him.

"Fowers for mummy!" he shouted, holding them up. "Me picked them for her all my own self, but me *can't* find her;" adding earnestly, as he slipped

his hands into Frank's, "have you *seen* her anywhere?"

I don't know why the sight of a little happy child, running to his dead mother with flowers in his hand, calling aloud her name in full confidence of finding her, should pierce a young man's heart more deeply than if he had seen that child cry his heart out on her cold body but as Frank caught Dody up in his arms, the strain upon heart and brain was snapped in a rain of tears that probably saved his reason.

"Don't ky," said Dody, kissing Frank's face; "mummy not like you to ky; mummy *love* you, and Dody love you too."

Perhaps if Mr. Eyre could have wept, he would not now be lying in the next room hovering betwixt life and

death, so that it seemed likely but one grave would be required for husband and wife; but when his paroxysm was over, Frank felt the power in him to do that which it had hitherto unnerved him even to think of.

He carried Dody back to his mother's door, and, knowing his obedience, bade him stand without, for he would be back directly; then, with the door open and the little child behind it, Frank approached the bed upon which Madcap lay.

He gently lifted the linen from her face. His heart gave one convulsive shudder, and stood still. No tears must fall there, and the oath that he had come to swear by her pale cold body, died on his lips. Not of the death she

had died, but of that life upon which she had entered, he thought as he looked upon her—

*This could ne'er my true love be ;
She was full of hope and light,
And the lilies on her breast
Could not yet have faded quite. . . .*

Somehow these were the thoughts that came into his head then. . . . “And so all my love could not save thee, Mad-cap?” he said aloud, in his anguish “Save thee ! Art thou not better off there than here?” He covered his face with his hands, then, with one last long look, replaced the linen, and left the room.

“You has been a welly long time,” said Dody, sighing, as Frank lifted him in his arms, and thought it but another vexatious delay when, half-way down—

stairs, Frank paused, and laid his ear against the child's chest to listen.

It was but a slight sound that he heard; but it seemed to come from Frank's own breast, as he clasped Dody nearer to him, and asked him if he had any pain.

"Oh, yes," said Dody, wrinkling up his nose with an air of consequence, and laying his hand on the bosom of his frock; "sumfin' here. But mummy 'll make it well for me," he added, nodding.

"Mummy is asleep," said Frank, "and Dody would not like to vex her, and Frank will stay with him, and play games;" he paused, groaning, and turned aside—he could not bear the child's clear eyes upon him, and thought himself

turning into a woman, so incapable was he of self-control. . . .

“But she’ll wake up bimeby,” said Dody, with perfect faith; “and we’ll take her the nosegay,” he added, even while Frank noted that the flowers had already withered in the grasp of the little feverish hand.

He carried him to the nursery, where Josephine sat, crying bitterly, while Doune stood beside her, frowning, and the very picture of revolt.

“I’ll *kill* him,” he said, stamping his foot, and without perceiving Frank, “naughty Digges to hurt my mamma—when I’m a big man I’ll shoot him dead;” then all at once threw himself face downward on the ground, crying out, “*Mother, mother!*”

Dody running to him showing him his nosegay, telling him that they would both go to see mummy presently ; but Doune thrust him away.

"You're too little," he said ; "you can't understand. She's *dead* ! "

"No," said Dody, "gandpapa's dead, mummy put fowers over his head ; but mummy's only gone to sleep, Frank says so. Didn't you, Frank ? "

Frank turned aside and asked for pen and ink, then sat down with Dody on his knee, who watched him with deepest interest as he wrote a telegraphic message to the most famous doctor of the day for diseases of the chest.

"But," said Josephine, who had looked over his shoulder, "the other doctor will

be here soon for master. Can he not prescribe also for Master Dody?"

But Frank shook his head; and having despatched the message, returned to Dody, who was rapidly developing every symptom of inflammation of the lungs, and long before nightfall was tossing in his bed, the withered flowers still firmly clutched in his burning hand, his little, unceasing, wistful plaint for his mother piercing Frank's heart. He was weary of telling the child that she slept, and Doune's absence (for he had mysteriously disappeared, and could not be found either in the house or grounds) caused him a new anxiety.

And alone, in the room adjoining Mad-cap's, Mr. Eyre lay, struck down by the hand of God at the very moment he

most required his strength, his stertorous breathing alone giving sign that he was numbered still in the ranks of the living.

The great man, who arrived from London that afternoon, could give small hope of him. He feared serious apoplexy, and that Mr. Eyre might die unconscious; but there was no likelihood of a change for probably another twenty-four hours.

Later in the day came another visitor to the house, who took Dody on his knee, and asked to see his toys, listening, as if in play, to his chest; then, after awhile, laid him gently back in his little bed, and thinking Frank the father, told the truth.

The child might live three days, it was

possible that he would not last out two. There was lung-mischief of long standing, precipitated into violent inflammation by a severe chill.

Dody smiled, and waved his hand to the great man when he went away, but during the night began to wander, and by daybreak had gone a long, long step of the journey that was to take him to his mother.

They had found Doune at last, rigid with cold and grief, beneath the sheet by Madcap's side—her chill hand in both his own, his aching head pressed to the bosom that would never shelter or warm him any more but he did not resist when they brought him away, nor did Dody's illness seem to move him—he crept into the darkest corner of the

nursery, thrusting away the food they would have had him eat. Frank realised then, as he had never done before, the intense power of loving that lay in that little heart, and knew how of the two, Dody's lot was the happier.

The tumult of confusion and horror without, at the crime committed, could not penetrate to the sick-chamber in which, night and day, Frank sate. He would see no one, take no steps to assist justice; for to him the sick fancies of dying child were of more moment than the bringing to death the slayer of his lost Madcap; and all day long, fasting and sleepless, he looked at the panorama of Dody's short young life that the child's babblings unrolled to his gaze all the great little events of

his three years, all told—his childish troubles, joys, thoughts each secret of the little crystal mind laid bare before him I wonder how many there are of us who could bear such a scrutiny as that to which a child unconsciously abandons itself we stifle our impulses or disguise them, but the child has no art to hide his if we had time to pause and study the drama of the child, we should no longer dream of God but understand Him and so long as there is an innocent little one in our midst, there is not one among us who shall dare to say it has not been given to him to look into an angel's heart.

And while he tossed in his little bed, Josephine, grown old and haggard-looking

in a night, passed to and fro, mistress of the situation, and virtually of the house, recognised even by those who shrank from her, as the sole person who had been able to meet the awful emergencies of the night and day.

To the questions of the detective, who had already arrived from town, she replied with a brevity and sense that contrasted favourably with the confusion of manner exhibited by the other servants, and even when asked if she had made that speech to Digges, to which the cook swore, she replied in the affirmative, but remarked that the man had had no more to do with the crime than herself.

If it had already crossed more than one mind that she herself, with Digges's assistance, had committed the crime, no

one dared utter the accusation in her presence; though when she was alone an awful look of fear came into her face, and a shuddering memory of the gallows she had seen erected for Janet Stork, took possession of her mind.

All that day justice waited, or moved in the wrong direction, while the search for the missing diamonds was carried on from attic to cellar, with the exception of that room in which the dead lay, and the nursery.

As the night drew on, Dody became much worse, and wandered more—talked of his little kitten, begging Josephine to take care of it while he was away, and lay it in her bed each night to keep it warm—thought it was prayer-time, and repeated a verse of his evening

hymn, breaking off into a merry laugh as he cried out, "*Saw* the Princess of Wales, mummy!" then, as though in answer to some question of his mother, added earnestly, "She looked very *luffy!*"—babbled of his little baby-girl, and of how he would wheel her about in his little "pram"—whispered in Frank's ear that he was going to get up early to pick mummy a birthday flower, but he must not tell Doune . . . then, as he grew weaker, talked less, but lay quietly in Frank's arms, patiently enduring those useless remedies that had been ordered, and that gradually the young man ceased, feeling them to be a needless cruelty.

Doune looked on with a bursting heart, he knew they were going to put his mother in a great black box like the one

that had taken away grandfather, and he feared they were going to take Dody away in it too. But mother was silent, and Dody could talk and laugh perhaps it was all an ugly dream, and he would wake up to-morrow to find everything just as usual and he climbed into his brother's bed at last, and fell asleep beside him. But as the night advanced, Dody grew rapidly worse, and Frank, who had sent Josephine to bed, took the little restless body in his arms, and walked with him to and fro.

In the deadest hour of the night, when the silent house showed from the outside but three lights in its windows, for the dying, the unconscious, and the dead, Frank heard footsteps come heavily up the stone steps from the garden, and a

moment after, a hand groping for the lock.

His heart beat so violently that Dody stirred in his uneasy doze; in that moment he knew the awful fear that had haunted him, and which now took shape in what stood without, not daring to knock and demand admission.

For awhile he stood rigid, his eyes fixed on the door, half expecting it, though locked, to part and disclose a terrible figure to his eyes; but the moments passed, and an absolute silence prevailed.

He sat down with the child in his arms, and moistened the feverish lips with a cooling drink, carefully covered up the little burning limbs, all with no sign of haste, but intensely conscious of

one thing only, that outside that locked door something crouched, and he must see it. He crossed the room, and laid Dody down by his brother's side, and Doune, half waking, clasped his arms about him, so that they looked but two happy little lads fallen asleep on one pillow as Frank turned away.

He lifted a corner of the blind, and saw opposite him the light burning in the room in which his lost, his murdered Madcap lay . . . his heart grew cold as ice, and the blood seemed to stagnate, and grow chill in his veins as he moved towards the door; and after a minute, in which his hand refused its office, unlocked the outer door, and set it open.

Something raised itself up, and came

slowly towards him, then falling back, said, in a hollow, starved voice, like one in whom the life has sunk too low to furnish strength with which to cry out—

“I wanted Josephine. . . .”

By the light that came through the door behind him, he saw her plainly—haggard, wild-faced, and travel-stained, while about her right hand, out-stretched as in fear, was tied a handkerchief soaked through and through with blood.

As he stood, not speaking, but with his arm outstretched as barrier to her entrance, a change came over her features; she tottered, and almost fell, then—

“He is dying—he is *dead*!” she cried.

“He is ill,” said Frank; “but why

do you come to him like a thief in the night? Where have you been all yesterday and to-day?"

She half looked over her shoulder to that light which burned in the opposite wing, then with a shudder and gasping cry, pushed past him, and ran into the nursery, where, seeing the little brothers asleep, and leaning their heads to each other, she fell down on her knees beside them uttering a faint "Thank God!" Outcast, and a something intangible that in Frank's eyes shaped itself to guilt, were written on her face when she looked up and met his eyes; then, as one whose thoughts escape her, she said, in a whisper—

"She's dead. Do they know who killed her?"

He came near to her; then said—his loathing eyes glancing at and away from her blood-stained hand—

“Go now—escape before it is too late—for her sake—because there must be no scandal over her grave. I will let you go; by to-morrow it may be too late to hide yourself from Mr. Eyre.”

She looked at him vacantly, almost with the expression of an imbecile; and the thought crossed his mind that she was indeed mad, and not accountable for her deeds; but in the same moment Dody's painful breathing arrested her attention, and she cried fiercely, as she sprang up, and bent over the child—

“He's more than ill, he's dying. What have you done to him while I've been away?”

She stooped to lift him, but Frank put her aside.

"Can you touch him with those hands?" he added, certain by now that they were stained with Madcap's blood.

She looked down at them for a moment; then as Frank took the child in his arms she fell on her knees, and with a terrible gesture of longing—

"*I have loved him best,*" she cried, "*give him to me!*"

At that wild mother-cry, rent from a bleeding heart, Dody opened his eyes with a start, and saw her. He smiled and stretched out his arms—

"Have 'oo come back?" he said. "But mummy's been to sleep such a long, long while, me *can't* wake her," he added, shaking his head sorrowfully.

She dragged herself on her knees to where Frank had moved, and prayed him, for the love of God, to let her hold the child in her arms but for one moment; but Dody took the matter out of his hands by struggling down, and throwing his arms round her neck.

“Seep wiz mummy!” he said, as his head fell on that soiled and weary bosom, to which for the moment he had brought back life and strength.

And Frank had not the courage to drag them apart, but stood aside, as she sat down on a low chair and rocked the child in her arms. Only he could not endure the sight, and with head sunk in his hands, threw himself down in a distant part of the nursery, and before long, worn out by the fatigues of the

previous day and night, was betrayed into a profound slumber.

Hester held her breath to hearken to his, until sure that he slept; then with a wild look around and upwards, as one who sees help neither in God nor man, laid her haggard face down on the child's head, and through the chill hours of the night watched him, till with wakening morn the fever and restlessness in him grew; then as daylight looked in at the unshuttered window, and on the sill without a bird boldly shot a ringing note, a shadow darkened the little face on which the watcher's heart hung, and for the last time on earth he opened his eyes.

"Maïy Kismus, mummy!" he cried, in a clear, loud voice, as thinking that

it was Yule-tide, and he had risen early to wish her a happy one and so, stretching out his arms to Hester, as though she were his mother, he went but one step alone and Madcap was never lonely any more, for Dody had found her

* * * *

When Frank awakened out of the dreamless slumber into which he had sunk, it was to hear Hester's voice talking to what she held on her knees; and as he started up, shaking the sleep from his eyes, he thought, angrily, that she must be mad to disturb the child so.

Her eyes were dry, her voice was hard and uneven. She had uncovered his feet, and held them in one hand

"Little feet," she said, "that will

never ache, or stumble, or trip on life's path—little heart that will never suffer, or grow hard and cold—always young, always loving—little hands that might have done great work in the world, but will never fail now, nor succeed . . . little lips that never said a cruel word, though often and often they've prayed for some little thing and been denied—and Josephine was unkind to you till I bribed her—as if a tender thing like you had got a chance against a grown person . . . and the more cruel we are, the surer you are to come to us sooner or later with the tears running down your little cheeks, saying '*Me good now.*' . . . we are so strong and you so weak; you can only fight us with your toys"

“O God!” she cried, breaking off suddenly in her monotonous talk, “he’s dead—he’s *dead* and I’ve been talking to him, forgetting that he couldn’t hear”

But long before the half-crazed woman had ceased to babble, Frank, realising that his darling had set out on his long, long journey without one word or kiss to him of farewell, had fallen on his knees beside that little lifeless body, moved to a passion of grief for the child, that even the sight of his dead, beloved Madcap had not been able to rouse in his heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

*It's I will kiss your bonny cheek,
And I will kiss your chin,
And I will kiss your clay-cold lip,
But I'll ne'er kiss woman again.*

THE moment that saw the extinction of one life at the Red Hall, saw the awakening of another. Mr. Eyre quietly opened his eyes, sat up and looked about him; his brain was perfectly clear, yet he thought he must be dreaming; for why was he sleeping here—and where was Madcap?

Hurling the clothes to right and left of him, he rose, and, like a grim, gaunt

spectre, half clothed, reached the door, just as the terrified attendant, aroused, saw him disappear through the doorway—a second Lazarus raised from the dead.

He went straight to his wife's bed, but in the dim light did not observe the watcher, who sat by the side of it. He paused a moment, as if at fault, said, "Madcap—wife," then drew the linen aside, as though instinct told him she was there.

At sight of that young familiar face, wrapped in an ineffable peace, through which a smile shone, as though she hearkened to music inaudible to grosser ears, the unhappy man stood as though struck to stone; then, in one overwhelming wave, the full tide of memory rushed

over him, he remembered all, even to the oath he had been in the act of swearing by her dead body, when the finger of God had touched, and struck him to earth.

That half-uttered vow was still unfulfilled ; but neither God nor man should hinder him now. He took that gentle body in his arms—of the first time that he had kissed her living, he now thought, as for the first time he kissed her dead, and swore aloud an oath that he would neither sleep nor eat, till he had found, and delivered up to justice, the hand that had slain her.

He covered her face, and, with a firm step, walked into the adjoining room. Battling with his weakness, he was more than half dressed when Frank, who had

been hastily summoned by the attendant, came in.

“What is being done?” said Mr. Eyre at once, as he proceeded rapidly with his dressing. “You have not allowed her to escape? She is safe in the gaol yonder? Curse this weakness,” he added, as the sweat poured from his brow, “that has kept *her* death unavenged so long!”

“She is not in gaol,” said Frank, “but she has not escaped.”

“You have been idle—you have sat down with folded hands while I was laid by?” said Mr. Eyre, in a voice of bitterest condemnation.

“Hush,” said Frank, with a gesture towards the closed door, “we cannot be certain that Hester did it—more likely

the diamonds were the incentive—remember that by incriminating her, you rake up the old story and do dishonour to *her* memory.”

“My sins cannot dim her purity or her peace,” said Mr. Eyre, “but Hester Clarke shall die!” And with a fictitious strength he strode down the gallery and staircase, while Frank followed, hoping to prevent Mr. Eyre seeing Hester while his dead child yet lay in her arms.

But in the hall a constable was standing with one or two jurymen, together with the coroner, who had held inquiry upon Madcap’s death.

They started back at the sight of Mr. Eyre—pale, gaunt, a blood-like tinge in his hollow eyes, his brow and lips firm as quarried marble.

"Gentlemen," he said at once, "what arrests have you made?"

"The evidence against Digges was very strong," replied the coroner—"a tramp also, who was seen hanging about here that night is being searched for."

"You may release Digges," said Mr. Eyre calmly; "the murderess is the woman Hester Clarke, and I command you instantly to commit her to prison on charge of the wilful murder of my wife."

"It was on that business we came," said the constable nervously; "we have the warrant here," and he produced it. "certain information came to our knowledge last night that throws grave suspicion upon her."

"To your work then!" cried Mr. Eyre

impatiently; then, as they looked at one another, a low whisper passing between them, added, "Why are you here?" The constable scratched his head, and looked at the coroner, the coroner looking imploringly at a short juryman, who consulted a lean one, but no aid being forthcoming from that quarter, they one and all maintained an absolute silence.

"Can't you speak?" cried Mr. Eyre, regarding them with fierce scorn. "Stand out of the way, then; I will find and arrest this woman myself."

"If you please, sir," said an officious housemaid, who had overheard the whole colloquy, "Mrs. Clarke is upstairs in the nursery, with poor Master Dody"—and the girl wiped her eyes with her apron.

“Poor Master Dody?” repeated Mr. Eyre, looking at her earnestly, “but come,” he added, and they all followed him with fear in their faces, as he led the way towards the nurseries.

“For God’s sake, Eyre,” cried Frank, overtaking him, “do not go on! She will not escape. I pledge you my soul she will not escape; only do not see her now”—but Mr. Eyre thrust him aside, threw the nursery door open, and advanced to the middle of the room.

“Constable,” he said, “do your duty. I give this woman in charge for the murder of my wife.”

He had seen only her as she sat crouched together on the low chair with something close huddled up in her arms, but now his eyes travelled downwards,

and rested on it. Was death in his own eyes, or in all he looked upon? He went a few steps nearer, and as he approached, she laid the child across her knees, and looked up at him.

"*Her* child!" he said; "murderess! and you dare to touch him!"

Their eyes met—a kind of rapt horror and breathless wonder in hers, a deadly hatred and bitter loathing in his own.

"You accuse me of . . . murder?" she said slowly.

Frank lifted Dody out of her unresisting arms . . . it seemed a profanation of that little tender body to lie between two who looked as these were looking on each other.

"Do your duty," said Mr. Eyre, turning to the constable; "remove her at once."

As the man approached, she made a wild gesture as of struggle—in reality she was fighting for breath—gasping for the reason that seemed to be deserting her; but the constable had expected trouble, and was prepared for it.

A click was heard as Hester tossed her clasped hands upwards. She seemed hardly to know they were secured, only, as the man would have led her away, she wrested herself free of him, and ran to where Frank had laid Dody down in his little bed, in which he looked as though he slept.

As she stretched her arms to him, the rivets of steel checked her; but the wild stricken look went out of her face as she stooped and kissed her darling's little hands, his lips, his neck; then with a

firm step walked, the constable beside her, to the door.

Opposite Mr. Eyre she paused, her lips moved, a look that should have found a response in his sprang from her eyes, but she found nothing; and suddenly growing cold, and as one whom some sinister sight appals, she disappeared, half led, half carried, from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

*Open thyself, O Earth ! and press not heavily ;
Be easy of access and of approach to him ;
As mother with her robe her child,
So do thou cover him, O Earth !*

A PROCESSION wound gently down the hill, the girls' voices sounded sweetly as they went, and made a long echo through the winding street, so that a stranger on horseback who met the children going before, dressed in white, with white flowers in their little hands, asked them if they were bound for a bridal. To which they replied, " Master, it is a white burying ;" while the older

ones, who followed after, answered only with tears, "it is the burying of our lady with her child."

He wondered, and drew aside. He thought that only the funeral of a maiden or a very young child had been thus; but she must have been one of those whose souls had been—

prepared to touch

The whitest thought, nor soil it much

and as he mused, with the low sound of weeping in the air, there passed him six young girls, who bore upon their shoulders something covered with a snow-white pall, heaped up with virgin flowers that scattered an exquisite fragrance on the air around.

Following them came young children, also dressed in white. Their voices took

up the dying echo of those who had gone before, and had a silvery sound in the clear soft air

*Thou hast stilled
Now thy little lamb's brief weeping.
Ah ! how peaceful, lone and mild !
In its narrow bed it's sleeping !
And no sign of anguish sore
Heaves that little bosom more.*

The voices ceased. Those before took up the strain, but this time they sang of *her*.

The chief mourner came in sight, wrapped in his black cloak, bare-headed, with no outward trapping of woe, save only the set face, the measured step, the hard-won composure that men make shift to bring to such an occasion as this.

He walked alone. Doune, who was to have followed beside him, had fallen behind and taken the hand of Frank, upon whom all eyes that day were fixed. Yet so noble was his face, so manly his air, so deep and bitter his grief, that women found it in their hearts to speak aloud their thoughts of him as he passed, the little child clinging to his hand.

After him came the Duke, and behind him the head of every family in the county with whom Mr. Eyre had been acquainted; last of all the farmers and the villagers, all bare-headed, and they made a long and weeping following as they passed on foot through the village, and up the hill to where the churchyard lay.

The air breathed softly—it was one of

those days that Madcap had loved, when involuntarily one looked around for the violets that must surely be springing, and the scent of the thousand flowers that Frank's love had procured confirmed the idea; but Mr. Eyre, as he crushed a blossom beneath his foot, thought of Madcap's wish, how she might die in spring, "*with good store of flowers to cover her. . . .*"

There was not standing-room in the little churchyard for the thousands who had come from far and near to the burying, and the voice of the clergyman was often inaudible for the sobs of those who pressed around him. Mr. Eyre alone made no sign, but stood with folded arms and bent head, as one who heard not a syllable that was uttered, or

saw one of the faces out of all those present.

As they lowered the coffin into the grave, the sun, that had got behind a cloud, suddenly shone out; at the same moment came a burst of singing from the young girls, that drowned the bitter weeping heard on every side.

It ceased. The sobs were not renewed; they had died in the triumphant joy of those drawn-out, lingering notes, and all felt that howsoe'er it might be with them, with her all was *well*.

And so they left them there, the young mother and her child. Be very sure that Dody did not feel the coldness of her breast; be sure that he was happy in that long, long sleep with her, that he had so often coveted, and that

some other where—ah, God ! that we might know *where*—warm and living, their freed souls dwelled in happiness together.

CHAPTER XVI.

*I wish my grave were growing green,
A winding-sheet drawn o'er my een,
And I in Helen's arms lying,
On fair Kirkconnel lea.*

MR. EYRE'S indomitable will had enabled him to preserve a calm demeanour that day; but it was characteristic of him that he did not pause a moment by Madcap's grave, but turning aside, and with no word or look to those who had come from so far to do her honour, walked alone to his house, and ascending to his wife's room, shut himself in, and locked the door.

The glance that he threw around, spoke of reason on the very verge of overthrow; yet it was with the fixed resolve to grapple with, and master something in his brain which for ever eluded him, that he advanced to a cabinet that stood on one side of the room.

It was remarkable neither for its usefulness nor its beauty, but as Mr. Eyre touched it, a distinct impression of some recent experience connected with it, fixed his attention; and as an ordinary weapon may become unique through some especial use to which it has been put, so Mr. Eyre found a curious fascination in a thing that he had seen every day for six years of his life, without once consciously observing it.

His fingers wandered over it, and

seemed to pause without his will at a certain handle. Strange! he could have sworn that not long ago he had opened that very drawer, either to seek something that was there, or to lay it away. Mechanically he drew it towards him, and saw that it was empty.

The cabinet stood back from the light; but as he remained, with his eyes fixed on the open drawer, he saw that a dark red stain crossed it obliquely—it was the stain of blood.

He pressed one clenched hand to his brow. Surely he had got the clue now that he had lost during the stupor in which he had two days lain . . . but no; it had escaped him before that, for even as he staunched the blood that flowed from Madcap's side on that fatal night,

his mind had been projecting itself backwards in a futile effort to remember something similar that had happened previously. Even Madcap herself impressed him with a strong sense of unreality quite distinct from dreaming, or rather it was like being reminded of a dream that he had forgotten, till the actual presentment of it brought all its details to his mind.

Step by step he forced himself to follow the events of that evening, remembered leaving Frank and Madcap in the drawing-room, and sitting down to his writing, over which, though his brain had never been clearer, he must have been overcome by one of those sudden fits of sleep that sometimes followed any severe excitement to which

he had been subjected, and from this sleep he had been wakened by the shriek above that had caused him hastily to ascend the spiral staircase that led from his study to the bedroom, where he had found Madcap alone and unconscious, seated in a chair drawn close to the open window.

But beyond and beneath these distinct memories, he was conscious of an abyss whose brink he approached with strong shudderings, yet fiercer will, but from which he found himself, as by some unknown force, dragged back at the very moment when he was on the point of piercing its depths . . . strange lightnings passed through his mind, revealing hidden places, yet never that one sealed chamber which was

locked against him; a moving chaos of half-seen visions and strangled recollections contended in him for recognition, while, driven with fury from opposite points of the compass, a crowd of ideas met and jostled each other in his brain, stunning him with the roar and confusion of a tempest. He had dared to pluck the curtain from the inmost recesses of his soul, and what did they give back to him in answer? Confused echoes, uncertain replies, like a face guessed at in troubled waters.

As worn out with fasting and agony, he covered his eyes, slowly from the background of a night black as pitch, he thought an apparition rose it was tinged with flame, blood dripped from its raiment and its hands. Above

its hollow eyes there gleamed a star, and that too was of blood-colour, and he recognized it for the spirit of murder, and knew that the hand hidden in its breast clutched a weapon he glanced aside, and there, pale and dimly illumined by the flame that glowed from her, crouched the shape of a man made in his own image, who seemed to importune her aid suddenly she drew the weapon from its sheath, pointed, and bade him strike.

A second figure rose within ken, of a woman dressed in white—the face was hidden, and her attitude was of one who slept—the man advancing with a species of blind fury, stabbed it to the heart; then with a gesture of joy, tore the covering from its face, to taste the fruits of his

deed. But what is this? He draws back—he hurls the weapon from him—he kneels by the murdered shape—he clasps its hands—he calls on it with tears and cries to reply to him; but it is silent, it has no power to reply, and he turns, with a terrible gesture of despair and upbraiding, to the spirit, who looks calmly on, with a smile, then pointing to his blood-stained hand, vanishes.

With the sweat on his brow, Mr. Eyre staggered to his feet, and gazed around him.

There stood the bed upon which she had lain, upon which she might be lying now—the beautiful, the beloved—had not the spirit of murder, that had entered in at the open door of his soul, in some awful inexplicable way, passed Hester by,

to return in other shape, to wreak itself upon what he guarded more jealously than his own life!

It was as if a man had resolved to slay his enemy with some instrument over which he had secretly gloated, and that he had often looked for an opportunity of using (sheathed and laid safe away where none could find it), and one day this very enemy had tracked him to his place of hiding, and with that very steel had stabbed his nearest and dearest to the heart. . . .

He knew himself to be a murderer in intent, if not in deed, that the homicidal impulse that had moved him in the hay-field had, on the occasion of Hester's threatening to harm Madcap, hardened itself into a roged determination to kill

her, rather than that his wife should be allowed to suffer; and if he had by a hair's-breadth escaped the crime, he was at heart guilty as though his hand had committed it. He clenched that hand now in a fury of impotence, and cursed it that when by striking it might have saved Madcap's life, it had forborne to lift itself; and so he was ruined and undone for ever.

Hester should die; but that would not bring Madcap back, and as the miserable man gazed around the deserted room, meeting at every hand those mute tokens of her late presence that make the pitiful language by which our dead speak to us, vengeance showed to him as dust and ashes, and hatred of Hester died in his breast, as, thinking only of *her*, he

stretched out his hands to the empty air, and cursed his Maker that he was not lying in her arms beneath the sod.

CHAPTER XVII.

*Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the
Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?*

AND now to hear what the outside world — “respectability with its thousand gigs” — had said to the deed of violence committed at the Red Hall. Within twelve hours of Mrs. Eyre’s death, the whole country-side was ringing with it; the house was besieged by persons who came from far and near to ask if the dread report were true, and to glean such details of the tragedy as they might.

The scandals that had been afloat con-

cerning Madcap were forgotten in the horror her fate excited—only her youth and sweetness were remembered now, and an indignant throb of pity for the murdered, of hatred for the murderer, thrilled every heart.

The disappearance of the diamonds reduced the crime to one of simple greed; but there were persons, of whom Mrs. Transome was one, who boldly declared that they did not believe a word about the diamonds, but felt sure Mr. Eyre had killed her in a fit of jealousy at her flirtation with Lord Lovel.

But this idea—for Mr. Eyre's devotion to his wife was well known, and no greater proof of his love could be asked than the unconscious, possibly dying, state in which he now lay—was received

coldly; and, indeed, the first confusion and horror had scarcely subsided, when it became known that the man Digges was released, and the woman Hester Clarke, after a short preliminary inquiry, been committed to take her trial on the capital charge at the next assizes. And then the public curiosity, that had slackened a little over so dull a criminal as the gardener, rose to fever-heat, as, bit by bit, the circumstances oozed out that were said to have led to her arrest.

Lord Lovel had been at the Red Hall on that fatal night, and his discarded mistress had followed him there, and, stung to a jealous madness, had gained access to Mrs. Eyre, and stabbed her to the heart, then escaped before the murder was discovered; this was the

first account bruited abroad. A second declared that Mr. Eyre, supposed to be engaged below, had discovered Lord Lovel hidden in the house after he had ostensibly left it, and that in the struggle which ensued, Mr. Eyre had snatched up a weapon, that had pierced Madcap as she threw herself between the two men, her cries bringing the gardener to the rescue, who was forthwith seized by the servants as the murderer.

A third account emphatically denied the two former ones, and said that the murder had been committed by a tramp, who had been refused alms at the servants' hall, and, hanging about the place, saw her through the drawing-room windows with the diamonds on her neck and arms, and by means of

a ladder placed against the wall, had later on entered her bedroom window, but, finding her awake, had stabbed her, and escaped with his booty.

The pathetic circumstances of Madcap's death, the knowledge of how she had been but a dying woman when her child was born, silenced more than one pestilent tongue, and gradually, during the fortnight that elapsed between her death and the opening of the assizes at Marmiton, the opinion that she had been more thoughtless than sinning, gained ground, while the strong impression against Hester Clarke deepened.

That after two days' flight she should have been arrested in the Red Hall itself, with the dead child of its murdered mistress on her knees, was held as

but another proof of her guilt. It is the fascination that the victim has for the slayer that leads to so many convictions, and Hester's affection for the child being unknown beyond the village, her presence at his death was supposed to be the result of mere accident.

Meanwhile the Duke and Duchess had unexpectedly returned, he to offer his sympathy and support to Mr. Eyre in his present unhappy position; she to count the hours till the opening day of the assizes, when, in company with certain other fine ladies of the county, she would occupy a seat whence she could see and hear everything that passed in Court, and once more behold the man between whom and herself there was no Madcap to stand now.

BOOK III.

WINNOWNED.

BOOK III.

WINNOWER.

CHAPTER I.

*O ! little did my mither think
The day she cradled me,
The lands I was to travel in,
Or the death I was to dee !*

THE trial of Hester Clarke commenced on Thursday, November the Twelfth, and terminated on the following Saturday evening.

By nine o'clock in the morning the best seats in Court were occupied by ladies, and on the bench were the Duke

of Marmiton and other county magnates, while immediately afterwards those who could not be accommodated with seats on the bench, disposed themselves in the body of the Court.

The counsel for the prosecution were Mr. Montague, Mr. Chambers, and Mr. Sharp; and for the prisoner, Mr. Valentine and Mr. Flower.

The attorney for the prosecution was Mr. Noble, and for the prisoner Mr. Day.

At half-past nine o'clock, a model of the house in which the murder had been committed was brought in and placed upon the table in the centre of the Court.

At ten o'clock the prisoner, Hester Clarke, was placed in the dock, and the Clerk proceeded to read over the

indictment to the prisoner, after which the jury were sworn, and the prisoner, in a low voice, having pleaded *not guilty*, Mr. Montague rose to address the jury for the prosecution.

He commenced by calling upon them to dismiss from their minds any impressions they might previously have formed of the murder of the young, beloved, and beautiful lady who had fallen a victim to the hand of the assassin.

He dwelt upon the awful haste, and the peculiarly pathetic circumstances that had attended her last moments—how, when practically a dying woman, she had yet lingered on till her little prematurely born babe saw the light, and then had died, unconscious to the last of having an enemy in the world, sending

with almost her dying breath a message to the prisoner at the bar.

He then proceeded to state that Mrs. Eyre had lately lived in great tranquillity and retirement, their sole visitor being Lord Lovel.

He would presently show that the visits of the latter had an important bearing on the case, but meanwhile he would describe the Red Hall, a model of which lay on the table. From the manner in which it was blocked up by stables and other buildings at the side, and by the cliff in the rear, it would be shown how almost impossible it was to gain access to Mrs. Eyre's bedroom without attempting it from the front.

There was no question of the servants being concerned in the murder, as they

were all below stairs at the time, with the exception of the nurse, who was in conversation with Lord Lovel when the shriek was heard that announced some fatal event, and set every one rushing towards the wing in which Mrs. Eyre's room was situated.

Not one of them bore her any malice ; even the gardener, when arrested for the crime, declared his inability to commit it, because she had always been kind to him, and (to use his own words) he had studied her likes and dislikes even beyond those of his master. There was not a single soul living who could have an unkind impulse towards her save the prisoner at the bar, who had been possessed of that cruellest, most unreasoning madness that can take possession of the human heart—jealousy.

For the innocent intercourse that had taken place between that poor murdered young lady and her old companion and playfellow, Lord Lovel, had been exaggerated, by vulgar report, into a connection very different to the one that existed; and on the evening in question, the prisoner had followed him to the Red Hall, and, herself hidden, been witness to, and auditor of, a conversation that took place between Mrs. Eyre and Lord Lovel, Mr. Eyre having temporarily withdrawn to the next room.

It would be shown in Lord Lovel's evidence how, after wishing his hostess good-night, he waited awhile for Mr. Eyre, but presently departed, the butler locking the door behind him. But in the moonlight he distinctly saw a figure

cross to the wing opposite Mrs. Eyre's room, and in which the nurseries were situated, and quickly following it, found, to all appearance, the rooms untenanted, save by the sleeping children.

The nurse shortly entering, he advanced with her to the inner room; and he had stood for, perhaps, some five or six minutes conversing with her, when the cry was heard of which mention has been before made.

It was to be remembered that Mr. Eyre and the servants were all below stairs; from the back her room was unapproachable, and the only possible manner by which the murderer could have got ingress to it was by a ladder placed against the wall by the gardener that afternoon, and forgotten by him

in the discharge of his duties until very late that night; but on this oversight the most important evidence of the whole case hinged, and would be gone into in due course.

On reaching Mrs. Eyre's apartment they were horror-struck to see her bleeding and unconscious, while Mr. Eyre himself, roused by her cry, having reached her more quickly than they, by ascending the staircase that led from his study to the bedroom, was staunching the blood that flowed from her side.

Almost immediately afterwards, the diamonds she had worn that night were discovered to be missing, and a man seen to be peering in at the window, who was immediately seized upon, and

in due course committed for trial as the murderer.

As prisoner, his lips were closed, but when Mr. Eyre awakened from the stupor into which the death of his wife had thrown him, he immediately ordered the man's release, and demanded the committal of the only person living who could have desired to harm his wife, and so was able to obtain from his gardener the real story of that unhappy night.

That evidence would presently be related, for the present it was sufficient to say that he had forgotten to remove the ladder from the side of the house during the afternoon, and remembering it late at night, and fearing Mr. Eyre's displeasure, had gone up to the Hall,

and after watching about some time, was in the act of grasping it for removal, when by its weight he felt that something was on it, and the next moment heard a shriek above him, and head foremost, at the peril of her neck, the prisoner had come rushing down almost into the man's arms. It might be argued that the shriek she gave was of horror at something she had beheld through the open window, but it was far more probable that it escaped her in the sudden fear that possessed her at finding some one at the foot of the ladder and so cutting off her escape, while an innocent person would certainly have raised an alarm, and, with natural horror, described what she had seen above, instead of fighting with the man like a wild

cat (to use his own words) and so escaping him, not a trace of her being found for two whole days. But on the third night she returned secretly to the Red Hall, supposing that the nurse, in whose confidence she appeared to be, would admit her; but Lord Lovel, who was sitting up with Mr. Eyre's sick child, opened the door, and seeing her disordered condition and hand deeply gashed and stained with blood, in the name of mercy, and possibly on account of the past relations that had existed between them, bade her escape while there was yet time, and before Mr. Eyre should awaken from the living death in which he lay, to denounce her.

But in the prisoner's perverted heart a ray of goodness was to be found in the

affection she had always borne the dying child, in whom she found some fancied resemblance to the one for whose murder Janet Stork had in that Court been tried for murder in May last; but certain evidence would be produced to show that even this pure affection was touched with guilt, as she had long ago made her plans to steal the child, and go away with him, and in the teeth of danger was returning for that very purpose, when she found that the little one was by death escaping to the mother whom he had loved above all else on earth. It would be shown that the prisoner was doubly jealous of the victim, both by her belief that Lord Lovel secretly adored, while he profoundly honoured Mrs. Eyre, and because she was unable to detach the child's superior

love from his mother to herself, thus mixing the basest alloy with that pure affection which might have been her saving, had she permitted it full play. Early next morning the child died, and in the same moment Mr. Eyre awakened from the deadly stupor that had held him in its grip, and his just impulse being to bring to justice the slayer of his beloved wife, and instinct guiding him in the right direction, he mustered strength to descend to the hall, where, unknown to him, the constable waited with a warrant for the apprehension of the prisoner in his hand. Within five minutes she was arrested with the little dead child on her knees, and on being led away and searched in gaol, there was found in her pocket a long, narrow knife, with a

slender handle, and a corresponding stain of blood in the pocket, proving that it must have been placed there when wet and dripping with the blood of the victim. But there was one piece of evidence more damning than all, which irrevocably chained the accused to the deed; it was this. The housemaid who had been deputed to set the room in order after its unhappy mistress's death, had, in the natural fear and horror of the situation, performed her duties but carelessly, so that she had overlooked a fact that the detective had the next day discovered, viz., a torn piece of a woman's dress caught in a projecting nail on the back of the chair in which the victim had been seated when surprised by the murderer. This fragment of clothing

had been found to exactly fit a piece missing from the front of the prisoner's gown, while the gash on her hand answered to the width of the knife found in her pocket, and might be conjectured to have been accidentally inflicted on herself, while stabbing at the poor young lady. That she should have entered the room, and left it before the murder had been committed, was proved to be an impossibility, by the fact of her having the dripping knife in her possession, unless it was to be supposed that she had wilfully, and for the purpose of attracting suspicion to herself, in cold blood, have inflicted the wound upon her own flesh.

If he were obliged to anticipate the defence, it was because he was entirely in the dark as to what might be set up; and

if it was urged that the prisoner neither gained by, nor could have any motive for the crime, he would reply that such was the intricate constitution of the human mind, that there were motives no one could conceive. Perhaps the prisoner had thought that, her honourable, beloved rival once removed, she would be first in Lord Lovel's affections, and in the heart of the child she profoundly loved; but if she had no motive, who could have had one?

Then the jewels Mrs. Eyre wore the night had disappeared; but when it was discovered that a crowd of servants were in the room, altogether in the confusion of the night, it was impossible to say what temptation which or

thieves, the diamonds had not been snatched up and hidden away, to appear in other form when the hue and cry after them was past. The committal of the man Digges had been a blunder of justice for which there was no accounting; had he been guilty, he would not deliberately have shown himself to the assembled household at a moment when all eyes naturally were seeking for the murderer.

It would be said that the evidence was merely circumstantial, and this was so; but if all the parts, if each atom, of the evidence were complete, he thought it was as conclusive evidence as could be had. The parts of evidence must not be considered separately, but taken altogether; and if the chain of proof were complete, the objection to such proof fell

to the ground. He would now call those witnesses who, if they contradicted neither each other nor themselves, might be considered to give something better than even direct evidence.

He then proceeded to tell the jury their duty in the case before him. It was one that required firm minds and upright hearts, with clear and intelligent understandings.

Should their verdict be an acquittal, it must be in the teeth of overwhelming testimony to the contrary. If, on the other hand, they found a verdict of guilty, it would afford satisfaction to those who, taking into consideration the youth and blamelessness of the victim, could find no parallel to its cruelty in the history of crime.

He spoke for twenty minutes, but this was the gist of his speech. When he reseated himself, from the Judge downwards, there was only one person present who had not mentally registered a verdict of guilty against the prisoner.

The first witness to the accusation was the man Digges.

Ashen-hued, trembling, his knees knocking together with fear, he was placed more dead than alive in the box. When called upon to take the oath, he stared idiotically, uttering such uncouth howls, as set the whole Court into stifled laughter, and could not be got to touch the Bible, being fully persuaded that whatever he did would conduce to his ruin—and only on catching Mr. Eyre's eye and receiving from him a reassuring

glance, showed any sign of recovering his scattered wits.

And so the inquiry into the bitter tragedy of Madcap's death began with broadest farce, for the sense of what the man said seemed actually lost in the absurdity of how he looked while saying it—though the sum total dragged bit by bit from his unwilling lips, and omitting all legal wrangles, was as follows:—

On the afternoon of the murder, he had placed a ladder against his mistress's window for the purpose of removing some weeds that were growing round it; but being wanted by the cook for some kitchen-stuff, he had forgotten the ladder till reminded of it by his master, who had come into the hothouse about

four o'clock, and had told him to saddle a horse and ride to the nearest town where exotics might be purchased, and to bring back all that he could find.

In doing this he had forgotten the ladder, and, after arranging the flowers, had gone home for his supper, and to bed; but at half-past ten he had woke up, and remembered the ladder, and how his master, who might be smoking a cigar out of doors that evening, would probably see it, and be angry with him for disobeying his orders, on the morrow. He had therefore put on his clothes, and gone up to the Hall, but to reach the ladder he must pass the drawing-room and library windows. The window of the latter was partly up, and he saw his master sitting at a table writing,

his head resting on his hand. The drawing-room window was also open, and as much as could be seen of the room behind, brightly lit ("all of a muck of candles," in Digges' vernacular), and he drew back when he saw two people in the window, so frightened that he had much ado not to cry out. Asked why he was frightened, he said that one was his mistress, and she had got fire playing all about her head, and neck, and arms. He wondered Lord Lovel did not try to put it out, but they were just talking quietly, as if there was nothing the matter at all. He got a bit nearer, and thought she must have got a swarm of fire-flies dangling round her made into a necklace and head-piece. Diamonds? He had heard of such things, but he

had never seen them, though he supposed they meant a deal of money. If those were diamonds she had got on, he had many a time seen glow-worms give a handsomer light, and yet they weren't worth no money to speak of. Did they see him? No, they were talking "courting-like;" and here the unhappy man, with a terrified look at his master, relapsed into contortions more frightful than before. A slight smile of pity curled Mr. Eyre's lips as he looked at him, but Digges, seeing the smile, took heart, and thought that his master was not angry. What were Lord Lovel and his mistress saying? He didn't know that he could answer that; folks had no business to repeat things that they overheard. But on being browbeaten and

bullied, and on receiving a slight nod from Mr. Eyre, Digges very unwillingly and frowningly made reply,—

“She said as how she’d allus luv’d him, and ever should, and he took her hand and kissed it as if it was ever so,” faltered out Digges; and all present turned to look at Mr. Eyre, who stood, with lips and brow firm as a rock, as indifferent to their gaze, as though he were alone.

Frank, too, showed no emotion, only his face took an added shade of sadness; it seemed to him so deep a dishonour to Madcap’s memory that her innocent words should be thus blared aloud in Court.

“Did you hear or see anything further?” was the next question.

“No!”—he didn’t listen; he didn’t

think nought of what he heard—the ways of quality weren't as poor folks' ways; and, having nothing else to do, it seemed to pass the time like with them to say what they didn't mean. But as he couldn't get round to the ladder, he thought he would go to the kitchen, and bide there a bit until the window was shut, and the company gone. He looked in at the library window as he passed, but Mr. Eyre was not at the table; he was standing by a door that led into the drawing-room, close to the open window, and he supposed Mr. Eyre was going through that way into the drawing-room.

At this speech, Mr. Eyre was observed to start, and look at him sternly and fixedly—hitherto he had worn a look of encouragement for the frightened wretch,

now he made a sign as though renouncing him as a liar and abandoning him to his fate.

The examination continued. Digges had gone to the kitchen, had a drop of something hot, and at half-past eleven went round to the front of the house, and had just got his hand on the ladder to lift it, when to his surprise he found that it would not move, that there was *something on it*--in his alarm he shook it, and in the same moment heard just above him a shriek that made his flesh creep, that seemed to come from Mrs. Eyre's room. For a moment he could not move; the next he began to run up the ladder, but met *something coming down*. He retreated backwards before it, and turning the bull's-eye of his lantern

upon what was rushing on him, saw that it was Mrs. Clarke, Lord Lovel's lady. He was so confounded at the shriek, and at seeing her there, that he let her run past him ; but, recovering himself, he seized hold of her skirt, only she fought like any cat, and got away, and he didn't run after her, for he wanted to know what was going on at the top of the ladder ; he didn't think that screech was his missus's, she had got a very douce voice, but he wanted to see ;—and here his grotesque contortions of face produced in the lookers-on a mingled cessation of laughter and horror, while Mr. Eyre's face grew harder, and Frank's a shade paler than it had been before.

His mistress was leaning back in a chair, with her back to the window,

and his master was standing beside her, holding a handkerchief to her side that was stained with blood. Almost at the same moment the door flew open, and Lord Lovel, with Josephine behind him, rushed in; and before he had got his wits back, he was seized and dragged backwards, though why he could not be trusted to go down the ladder alone he did not know, as he had done nothing, and no doubt would be hanged for it, though he had never harmed his mistress in her life, he loved her a deal too well for that.

Here his evidence ended, and he was dragged out of Court, bellowing like an ox, and firmly convinced that, in spite of appearances, he was being led there and then to execution, while

those who had thought it possible that the man had murdered his mistress for the sake of the diamonds, did not see how his simplicity had told more in his favour than a volume of evidence could have done against him.

All eyes now turned to the prisoner, who during the harangue for the prosecution had stood perfectly still, like a creature stunned by a sudden blow from which she has not been given time to recover, her beauty dulled, almost effaced by the heavy cloud that overshadowed it, so that the women wondered what Lord Lovel could have found to admire in this stupid-looking criminal.

Mr. Eyre looked at no one. Presently a ray of sunshine penetrated the Court, and fixed his eye. "Madcap is

dead—dead——” he glanced round the Court. How forcibly the scene reminded him of that other trial last spring—these women, with their opera-glasses; these gaping country folks, with their curiosity and their fear; the Judge, with his wig a little awry, the same one who had condemned Janet to death; while he himself, who had looked on as witness at a trial for the murder of his own child, now, in the same spot, looked on at that child’s mother charged with the murder of his wife.

Sin ever has its inexorable consequences; but in this instance the fatality of the crime that once committed, had remained attached to the chain of events as a link of iron, was surely something to tremble at . . . this dead sin with

its train of awful consequences rising out of the forgotten past, to stand face to face with the living ignorant cause to-day, a thing to make a man fear lest even his thoughts of evil might not be unknown potentialities for crime impelling him to a frightful but inevitable consummation of which he had never dreamed.

Sarah Bodkin, maid to the late Mrs. Eyre, was then examined.

She said that she had dressed her mistress for dinner as usual that night; but Mr. Eyre having come in, and seen the diamonds open in their cases on the table, had requested her to wear them; and while she went to fetch the children, himself fastened the jewels in her hair, and on her neck and arms.

Her mistress had rung her bedroom bell at about a quarter to eleven, and she had unclasped the diamonds, and taken off her evening dress, but had not replaced the stones in their cases, as Mrs. Eyre had said she would do so herself presently, and meanwhile asked for a white wrapper, and sat down to read at a little distance from the window, which was open, the night being as mild as September.

Her mistress had wished her good-night as usual when she left the room, and seemed in good spirits—not so high, perhaps, as sometimes, for she was a very happy spirited lady; she would play about, and laugh just like a child, when nobody was looking (and here the woman turned aside to weep bitterly); and wit-

ness had never thought that in less than an hour she would see her poor lady bleeding in that very chair.

She had heard the cry that aroused the whole house, and hurried with the other servants to the room, but never thought about the diamonds until Josephine had exclaimed that they were gone, and before witness could recover herself to look round in search for them, the appearance of the gardener at the window had diverted her attention; and though she afterwards made a careful examination of the room, she could not discover a trace of the precious stones.

After some cross-examination, in which no fresh evidence was elicited—

Josephine Eénouf was called. Her relation to the man Digges had attracted

the popular attention, and her appearance fixed it, as faultlessly attired for the character, and with that play of feature which in a Frenchwoman does duty for a blush, she commenced her evidence as follows:—

She had been bidden at about half-past six o'clock on the night of the murder to take the children to her mistress, and had admired the diamonds with which her lady was decked, but had shortly taken the children back to the nursery, and after putting them to bed, had gone down to the kitchen to have a chat with her fellow-servants, and fetch her supper. She was supposed to eat this in the nursery, but partook of it below stairs that night, and afterwards joined in a game of cards in the

servants' hall, the gardener coming in unexpectedly towards the end of it. They had fallen to talking of the diamonds, and she had said in joke that she would marry him (Digges) when he could give her as fine a necklace as the one her mistress was wearing that night, and being a stupid fellow it had taken some time to explain to him what diamonds were, and how valuable. She had remained behind after Sarah Bodkin had answered her mistress's bell, and on returning to the nursery had been startled to find Lord Lovel there, for she knew that the butler had gone upstairs to shut up the house for the night, supposing him to be gone.

His lordship accounted for his appearance there by saying that he was certain

he had seen Mrs. Clarke enter, but on assuring him that such was not the case, he had advanced to the inner room to search it, and was conversing with her on the subject of Master Dody's health, when the shriek was heard from the opposite wing that roused the house.

Witness then detailed the scene that had met her eyes when she had rushed to Mrs. Eyre's room, and in spite of a severe cross-examination, was firm in her denial that she had removed the diamonds in the confusion of the scene.

Cross-examined as to her intimacy with Hester Clarke, she admitted it, but added that her mistress knew of, and encouraged it, and had bade her let Master Dody walk or play with the prisoner whenever they should meet her abroad.

At these words, a look of agony was observed to cross the prisoner's features, her head sank lower, and the whole attitude of detected guilt became more marked.

Her examination continued, Josephine said that she had not been present when Mrs. Clarke had returned to the Red Hall. She had sate up the preceding night, and Lord Lovel had insisted on her going to bed; and a sharp cross-examination elicited but little more from the Frenchwoman than the foregoing, and it was with an air of conscious innocence that she left the box to make room for the next witness, the Doctor who had been fetched by Frank, and who had been with Mrs. Eyre till within an hour of her death.

He said that he had previously attended Mrs. Eyre in her illnesses, and was called up at about twelve o'clock on the night in question. He found her lying on the bed, pulseless, and apparently dead, her white wrapper deeply stained with blood, and on the left side, just below the heart, a small incised wound, likely to be produced by a narrow, long knife, such as the one now produced in Court. By the aid of violent remedies he had produced some signs of life in her ; but she was practically dying when he first saw her, and would in all probability have succumbed to the fatal blow at once, were it not for the condition in which she was.

Cross-examined as to whether she had not actually died in child-birth, or of the

violence of the remedies applied, he said that to live more than a few hours after such an injury was impossible; and when pressed as to whether the chloroform administered by Mr. Eyre had not been dangerous to her life, he replied that though possibly she might have been kept alive another hour or two by skilful management, nothing could have extended her life to the middle of the following day. Great force must have been used in making the blow, and it was impossible that she could have inflicted it on herself—everything pointed to its being struck while she was asleep, as Mr. Eyre's evidence, taken from her own lips, would presently show.

The next witness called was Lord Lovel. He was in deep mourning, and

in this respect offered a marked contrast to Mr. Eyre, who, to the scandal of all present, was habited precisely as usual; while in Frank's haggard face grief showed more plainly than in Mr. Eyre's, who was but a shade darker and grimmer than his wont.

Yet there was neither fear nor shame in Frank's look, but something so noble that those who had suspected him felt their thoughts to be their own dishonour. He briefly gave his evidence, to the effect that he had dined at the Hall, spent the evening with Mr. and Mrs. Eyre, and, on the former retiring to the library, had stood for a short time by the open window with Mrs. Eyre, after which she had gone upstairs, and he had waited for Mr. Eyre until close upon

half-past eleven, when he had left the house ; but seeing a figure flit across the open and disappear in the children's wing, and, suspecting harm, he had gone at once to the nursery, and finding the door ajar, entered.

Being asked what reason he had to suspect harm to any of the inmates of the Hall, Frank did not immediately reply. He was wondering how much was known of the real story, and whether it were bound to come out in the course of the trial he chose a middle course, and told a part of the truth.

He knew, he said, that the prisoner had a very strong affection for Mr. Eyre's younger child, and had suspected her of an inclination to steal it. It was for this

reason that he had re-entered the house by way of the nurseries.

Asked if he thought the murder had been committed by the prisoner through jealousy caused by himself, he replied coldly that he did not consider himself obliged to answer that question.

He then corroborated Josephine's evidence, and described the circumstances under which he had accompanied her to Mrs. Eyre's bedroom.

Here his by no means interesting evidence ended, but his cross-examination took longer, and was another matter.

"Lord Lovel was quite sure that there was nothing in his conversation with Mrs. Eyre to which her husband could object, if (according to the gardener's

evidence) Mr. Eyre was an unsuspected auditor of their conversation ? ”

But Frank, not choosing to reply to this question, it was not pressed, though one equally offensive was substituted.

“ Lord Lovel did not think it likely that his host had purposely left them alone, that he might play the spy upon them ? ”

Frank looked up, and his eyes meeting Mr. Eyre's, both men smiled, and none present could henceforward doubt the perfect confidence that existed between them.

He answered, however, that as nothing was likely to be said in Mr. Eyre's absence that could not freely be said in his presence. there was no necessity whatever for his host to listen at key-holes.

Frank was next asked if it were not a matter of public notoriety that some months since he had eloped with the deceased lady, and on her husband pardoning the escapade, witness had afterwards been received on his former friendly footing at the Red Hall?

Frank replied haughtily that it had certainly been his privilege on one occasion to escort Mrs. Eyre on a morning ride from the White House to her own home, as she was desirous of seeing her children; but he failed to see what bearing such a question could have on the case.

His proud, indignant looks, his shame for Madcap's sake, at hearing her memory thus assailed, for the moment touched the whole Court into unison with his

feelings, and his tormentor did not dare to further press the point, but commenced on a new tack.

“And you are able to swear on your oath that you were with Josephine Eénouf in the nursery when the scream was heard that brought the household to its mistress’s bedroom?”

Frank looked at his interlocutor, and asked him where else he was likely to have been?

“You are prepared to swear that you did not, in collusion with the nurse, obtain access to Mrs. Eyre’s room, and being surprised in it by her husband, the blow was struck that ended in her death?”

Frank’s manhood was not proof against this last crowning insult to his dead

saint his mouth quivered like that of a child, too hurt even to speak, and his head sank on his breast.

That her name should be thus bandied about in open day she

“You may commit me for contempt of Court, if you please,” he said sternly, “but I will not answer another question that you ask me on this subject.”

“I will change it then to one upon which I am compelled to question you—that of your relations with the accused. At the time of the murder she was residing in the village, nominally, as your mistress?”

“She was.”

“She felt and expressed great jealousy of Mrs. Eyre?”

“Never to my knowledge.”

“ You do not think it likely that the murder was committed through jealousy on account of yourself ? ”

“ I am sure that it was not.”

At the conclusion of the examination of this witness the Court adjourned to ten o'clock on the following day, and after a word or two to his friends who rallied round him, Mr. Eyre rode homewards with Frank.

Not a syllable was exchanged between them, but when at a turn in the road they saw the distant lights shining in the Red Hall, Mr. Eyre dropped the reins on his horse's neck, and groaned aloud.

“ And so we have lost her, Frank,” he said, “ and your house is cold—but not so cold as if she had made it warm,

then gone away and left you to feel an iciness more bitter than that of the grave." He wrung Frank's hand, then spurring his horse onward, was instantly gone.

"O wife! wife!" he said aloud, as he entered his own gates. "Poor murdered Madcap," and repeated over the lines—

*Since you noo mware be at my zide
In walks, in zummer het,
I'll goo alwone where mist do ride,
Drough trees a-drippen wet;
Below the räin-wet bough, my love,
Where you did never come,
An' I don't grieve to miss ye now,
As I do grieve at hwhome.*

CHAPTER II.

It is hard to personate and act a part long, for where truth is not at the bottom Nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will peep out, and betray herself one time or other.

THE Court resumed next morning, and was crowded in every part. At ten o'clock the prisoner was placed at the bar, and though still very pale, had lost much of that crushed appearance she had displayed the day before; and on Mr. Eyre's entering the witness-box, showed symptoms of almost uncontrollable agitation.

He himself gave no sign of emotion as he briefly gave his evidence, and even

under the cross-examination betrayed none of the impatience and anger that Frank had done.

Asked if he had ever felt any jealousy of Lord Lovel, especially on that fatal night, he looked across at Frank, and involuntarily the two men smiled, thereby greatly scandalising the jury, who could not see that the murder of a man's wife was a matter for joking to the man himself.

Asked if he had unlocked the door, seldom used, that connected the library with the drawing-room, and which on the latter side was hidden by a thick curtain, Mr. Eyre replied that from the moment of entering the library he had not once left his seat at the writing-table till he was roused from a doze into

which he had fallen, by a shriek that appeared to come from his wife's room, and that caused him immediately to ascend the small staircase that communicated with her apartment.

On being reminded that the gardener swore to seeing him standing by the door on the other side of which Lord Lovel and his wife were conversing, while in confirmation of his assertion the door was next day found unlocked, Mr. Eyre replied indifferently that Digges must have seen double, and the servant herself had probably unlocked the door, for he knew nothing of it.

Cross-examined as to why he had bade the servants seize the gardener, he said that for the moment he did not recognise the man, and supposed the crime to have

been committed for the sake of the diamonds.

“He was no longer of that opinion?”

“No; the murderer, or rather, murderess, was standing in the dock at that moment.”

If none present had seen Hester's eyes before, they saw them then, as with an indescribable gesture she flung her head back and looked at Mr. Eyre across the Court. Many held their breath as the eyes of the accuser and the accused met, her lips parting as though forced asunder by the torrent of fire that strove to escape from them . . . for a moment she looked a dangerous creature, an unknown quantity of evil that by its own force impressed itself physically on the understandings of those around her, appalling

them with a sense of tragedy of which both cause and issue were unknown; then dragging her eyes from his face, sat down, a death-like rigidity succeeding to the violent emotion that had convulsed her.

“ You were so firmly convinced of the prisoner’s guilt that you actually committed her to gaol on no other grounds than your own suspicions ? ”

“ I did.”

“ At that time you had not heard the man Digges’ evidence of what had happened the night of the murder ? ”

“ Not a syllable.”

“ You knew of reasons why she was likely to have committed the murder ? ”

“ I did.”

At this moment a subdued hubbub
VOL. III.

M

was heard outside the Court, and two constables entered, one of whom bore a sealed packet, that with certain whispered intelligence was immediately handed up to the judge. The second constable led in Josephine, pale as death, with every sign of guilt written on her face.

A cry of "*The diamonds!*" thrilled the Court, as the judge broke the seal, and there fell out a glittering cascade of jewels on the notes that lay before him.

He lifted one in his hand, and as the light fell full on it, Mr. Eyre, who was extraordinarily long-sighted, leaned forward and looked at it intently.

"I have seen that jewel before," he exclaimed, and requested that it might be handed to him, together with the rest.

He looked at without touching them, and when asked if he recognised them, replied—

“Certainly.”

“They belonged to your late wife?”

“No.”

“To whom, then?”

“To the prisoner.”

Asked if his acquaintance with her had been such as to justify his swearing to every one of these jewels as her property, he replied that there was not a trinket there he had not purchased himself.

A thrill of excitement passed through the Court as he spoke; but scarcely was time given to guess at what was coming, when he went on—

“I gave those gewgaws some seven years ago to the prisoner, who was then

my mistress. That there may be no misapprehension in future on the subject, and the reason for her murder of my wife be better understood, I also declare myself to have been the father of the child for whose murder Janet Stork was tried in this Court, and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, in May last."

A dead silence succeeded this speech, as if those present were unable to take in its full significance; then Hester's counsel darted a quick, angry look at her, and made a gesture as if he threw up his brief.

The judge looked for Lord Lovel, but, finding he had left the Court, shook his head, and glanced coldly at Mr. Eyre, who stood, with folded arms and in-

different eye, waiting till vulgar surprise and curiosity should exhaust itself, and permit justice to proceed. But lawyers are inured to surprises, and there was no very appreciable pause between his speech and the next question put to him—

“If the trinkets belonged to his former mistress, how did witness suppose they had come into the possession of his servant?”

“They had probably been used to bribe the woman,” Mr. Eyre said, with a look at Josephine, beneath which she trembled; and the evidence of the constable who had brought her being then gone into, it was proved that the jewels had that morning been found hidden beneath a plank in the nurse’s room, and that she

had exhibited such extraordinary fear on their discovery that a much closer examination was now being conducted, in the expectation of finding other hoards.

There suddenly flashed across Mr. Eyre's memory the cupidity of the woman's eyes on the night she had seen her mistress dressed in the diamonds, and he glanced at her keenly, but in the same moment put the thought by—he was so convinced of the guilt of the woman who stood in the dock before him.

Cross-examined as to his reasons for practising such a deception, and asked if he considered it the act of a man of honour to allow his friend to be publicly accredited with his sin, Mr. Eyre replied, carelessly, that it was no question of his

honour, but of his wife's happiness, which, thank God ! and in spite of the manner of her end, had been preserved to the last.

There were those present who believed they saw Satan in the flesh, as they gazed at this man, in whom was no ruth or pity ; who could own himself to their eyes a man who had not scrupled to sacrifice his friend's honour to his own well-being, and who now deliberately pursued to the death a woman whose crime, if she had committed one, distinctly lay at his door.

But there was one present who loved him better in his ruin than she had ever loved him in his honour, though he was not even conscious of her gaze, looking on all that passed around him,

as figures in a kaleidoscope, with which himself and his inward thoughts had nothing to do.

Asked if he thought that jealousy of his wife was likely to have precipitated the prisoner into the crime, Mr. Eyre replied that he considered the motive a mixed one—intense jealousy of Mr. Eyre being subordinated to the woman's rooted determination to punish him through his wife.

He then detailed his conversation with her on the afternoon preceding the murder, and this produced a marked effect on the jury, who, since Mr. Eyre's bold avowal of the truth, had felt some relentings towards the prisoner. There was little more to be added, and when he left the witness-box Josephine

entered it, and, at considerable length, was cross-examined as to how the trinkets had come into her possession.

She had by now regained a large portion of her self-command, and answered without hesitation all questions put to her, though every word she spoke deepened the popular impression against the prisoner at the bar.

She said, that not satisfied with seeing the children out of doors by Mrs. Eyre's permission, prisoner had endeavoured to gain access to the house at night and other times, and to this witness had demurred, knowing that if it came to Mr. Eyre's ears she would lose her situation. But by degrees she had permitted herself to be bribed, first by one trinket, then another, till at last prisoner had come

and gone at the house pretty well as she liked. (A model of the house here produced showed that the nursery was reached easily from the garden, the iron steps being screened from sight of the opposite wing by the thick shrubs that grew around it.) Witness knew that latterly prisoner had shown great bitterness of feeling towards Mrs. Eyre, and had dropped hints of punishing her for being so happy, before long.

This part of the evidence was only elicited with great difficulty, and it was observed that witness held her eyes studiously averted from those of the prisoner in the dock.

She had not reflected that payment of some sort would be required for these trinkets, whose value might be roughly

estimated at some hundreds of pounds, and would swear that she had never by word nor deed been accessory to the murder of her mistress.

At the close of the cross-examination of this witness, the Court adjourned for luncheon, and Mr. Eyre saved his fellow magistrates the awkwardness of meeting him by going at once to a particular inn hard by, where, as he had expected, he found Lord Lovel.

“And so you’re cleared, Frank,” he said, laying his hand on the bright head sunk in the young fellow’s arms; “and now I can walk erect, and fear no man—morally I’ve been going two-double these six months.”

“Why did you tell them?” said Frank, lifting a haggard face; “there was no need.”

“Was there not?” said Mr. Eyre, looking at the young man with strange gentleness. “I think so, and it will make another link in the chain of evidence that will hang the woman.”

“Did she commit the crime?” exclaimed Frank involuntarily; “the evidence is circumstantial enough—and yet—I think Digges was dismissed too soon—or what if Josephine committed the murder after all?” said Frank.

“No,” said Mr. Eyre; “she has the courage to steal, but not to murder. Strange,” he went on, “the look that other woman gave me when I denounced her as the murderess—her ungovernable emotion, checked at its very height, petrified, as by a cold blast of reflection—it reminded me of Etna’s

molten lava that, sweeping over the head of the valley in a river of fire, falls at the foot of the precipice in masses of solid rock — there's something inconceivably horrid in the sound of the crags striking against the bottom," added Mr. Eyre absently.

"That sudden calm was unnatural," said Frank. "What could it have been that she forced herself not to speak? I begin to doubt——"

"Doubt nothing," said Mr. Eyre; "there's proof enough in the fragment of torn clothing — the blood-stained knife," exclaimed Mr. Eyre; adding abruptly, "It is curious, but I could have sworn I had seen, and handled that knife before, and it corresponds exactly to that stain in the drawer;" he passed his hand

across his brow, as though to dismiss some haunting thought, then said, "but you'll come back with me into Court? You've been a hero too long to mind folks knowing it."

"I'd rather go a thousand miles," cried Frank; "and the moment all this is over I shall leave the place for years. I can't be any use to you now."

"And so you never had a kind feeling for me on my own account," said Mr. Eyre; then checked himself, and added grimly, "I wonder what they are saying about me over there? Think of Busby's triumph! What a fall, Frank—but, thank God, it's nothing since *she's* not here to see it. The afternoon will be a long one, but I think to-morrow will see the end; and then—and then——"

"What then?" said Frank, struck by something in Mr. Eyre's tone. .

"Then I shall rest. And you'll go away and forget; you are only a boy yet. But I must begone; I have an interview to get over, and she shall have every chance. Don't laugh when her counsel makes his speech for the defence. And it doesn't matter, pure souls in heaven aren't plagued with shorthand notes of a *cause célèbre*."

"I'll go with you," cried Frank, starting up, as he thought of Madcap, and of how she would have scorned him, had he permitted her beloved to go forth alone to face his enemies.

"Will you?" said Mr. Eyre, looking at him earnestly. "Well, then, I accept the sacrifice. I wish them to see what

a man *might* be, side by side with what he *is*."

And so, when the Court reassembled an hour later, the two men entered it together.

CHAPTER III.

*I would be High, but see the proudest oak
Most subject to the rending thunderstroke.*

*I would be Wise, but that I often see
The fox suspended while the ass goes free.*

MR. EYRE'S character, discussed by his friends at luncheon, had suffered severely. Inhuman, dishonourable, lying—these had been some of the epithets applied to his conduct, and even the Duke had not been able to stem the current of popular opinion against him. It was taken for granted that he had from the first known the child drowned in the Shifting Pool to be his own, and

pushed the charge against the woman, Janet Stork, with relentless vigour, till the accident of the mother's appearance in the place had compelled him to a dishonourable policy, in which, by private agreement with Lord Lovel, he had made the young man the scapegoat of his sin. The power of his influence over his discarded mistress was gauged by the fact, that though residing in the village for nearly seven months, she had never even sought to discover herself to the wife, but had shared with Lord Lovel the false position in which Mr. Eyre's hypocrisy had placed her.

In the minds of the jury this latter consideration was destined to bear unexpected results, while at the same time a stormy interview was going forward

between the prisoner and the counsel that Mr. Eyre had engaged on her behalf.

It had been incomparably more brilliant than his own, for he had characteristically said that being guilty she should have the best advice, and so had secured in her service one of the finest criminal pleaders of the day.

It had been only by the most urgent questioning that her counsel had been able to extract a single fact upon which to base her defence, but when in the teeth of the morning's evidence, she still refused to furnish him with any information, he more than half felt himself justified in abandoning her to her fate. For this was a case upon which the eyes of the civilised world were fixed, and to

bring her safely through would be a triumph that he might not easily forego.

But his utmost stress of urgency could elicit from her no account of the events on the night of the murder. From the time she had left her lodging in Synge Lane, at eleven o'clock, to the moment when she was arrested with the body of the child in her arms, all was a blank.

In vain her counsel declared that the penalty of her silence must infallibly be death at the gallows; she was indifferent to the prospect; she saw beyond it Dody's welcome, and his mother's kiss, as she said, "I misunderstood you once, but *now* I understand" and the utmost confession he could wring from her was to the effect that when she had

come to Lovel in search of her servant, Janet Stork, she had no conception that it was the dwelling-place of her child's father.

Against Mr. Eyre she would say nothing, but there was a determined reticence in her manner that spoke of reserves of knowledge to which her questioner was not admitted, and it was with a conviction that in his speech for the defence he must draw on imagination rather than facts, that he left her. Hester sate for awhile alone after her adviser had left her, and looked around, fixed like, Janet, in the resolve to die, should justice command it.

As she sat with her head on her arms, thinking of that beyond in which her own child and his brother might per-

chance come to meet her, approaching footsteps warned her that it was time to ascend to the dock above.

Entering the Court with that softened look still on her face, she produced a more favourable effect on the public than she had yet done ; while Mr. Eyre, perhaps by contrast with Frank, had a harsh, repellent air that denied sympathy, and made him look to the life the character assigned to him by his deeds.

A murmur of admiration was audible when Frank entered—for in the eyes of many that one lie of his was sufficient to efface any past sins that he had committed, and open to him the gates of Paradise—but at sound of it he coloured deeply, and felt the impulse

to turn back, but he would not leave Mr. Eyre, and for the remainder of that day, and all the next, stood beside him.

Some minor evidence, including that of prisoner's landlady, who swore to her having left the cottage in Synge Lane at about ten o'clock on the night of the murder, and that she never again returned there, closed the case for the prosecution; and, amid a breathless silence, and in a Court packed to suffocation, the counsel for the defence rose to address the jury on behalf of the prisoner.

CHAPTER IV.

Life is sweet.

“MY Lord, and gentlemen of the jury,” he said, “in the whole course of my experience of the criminal Courts of this country, I have never risen to address a jury under more painful feelings, or with greater anxiety, than upon this occasion. There are circumstances in the case that, even as they were developed before the magistrates, to cause me much anxiety; and such being the case, how much more must that anxiety be increased by the production of this morning’s most unexpected evidence, by which the unhappy woman

at the bar may be placed in the greatest peril, and most awful jeopardy. Gentlemen, I have not merely to deal with the facts of this case, as they appear in evidence, but I have to contend against the prejudices that have been born of the peculiar circumstances by which this case is surrounded—circumstances intensified tenfold by the extraordinary revelations made in Court that day. When I gaze around me, and see the numbers that fill this Court, feeling with them the thrill of indignation at the dastardly crime committed; when I turn to the prisoner—a stranger, without a living soul to stand by her in her distress—lonely, deserted, to all seeming abandoned by God and man—my spirit sinks at the magnitude of the task I have

taken upon me. Nevertheless, relying on the noble independence of a British jury—on its strict integrity, on its sense of justice—I have no fear of such a tribunal, and know that the whole case will be fully, fairly, and impartially considered by you.

“Having made these observations, I shall now proceed to consider the most unparalleled circumstances of this painful case.

“In the first place, I would answer the question of the learned Counsel for the prosecution, as to who could possibly have had a motive for the murder, unless it had been the prisoner?

“That some one had a motive for compassing that poor young lady’s death he would presently be prepared to show;

but that person was not the prisoner. And before attempting to refute the evidence against her, he would tell the story of her life—in itself a more complete refutation than any other that could be afforded.

“Some eight years ago, when young and very beautiful, the prisoner had become attached to Mr. Eyre, and for a while was happy, believing herself secure of his affections; but at last he fell in love with a young girl of less than half his age, who, ignorant of his long-standing connection with the accused, loved him in return. Her friends, who knew his story, forbade the marriage, the more so as she had previously become engaged to Lord Lovel, who was nearly of her own age, and most deeply

attached to her ; but a few days before that fixed for her wedding with him, she contrived to elope with Mr. Eyre, and was married to him before they could be overtaken.

“Meanwhile, what does this woman do, who is left alone, loving the man who has abandoned her as passionately as he once loved herself, and with a secret to bear of which he had not dreamt? He had provided for her, he had done all that honour demanded, if less than love asked ; and, doubtless the world would have blamed her had she pursued him into the presence of his new and happier love ; but she made no such outcry over her loss. She did not declare that, since love was denied her, vengeance should be hers ; but lived

alone, unfriended, until just before her child was born, when she sent for her foster-sister, who came. But so careful was she that no shadow of her misery and degradation should pass between Mr. Eyre and his happiness, that she would not even reveal to her foster-sister his name—the foster-sister, who was the one person on earth who loved this forsaken, unhappy woman, and who attended her devotedly throughout that terrible time. But this woman, with the stern instinct of revenge common to her class, took the resolve to confront the father with his child, and rouse him from the dream of happiness in which he was sunk to contemplate the misery of the woman whom he had once loved. And by patient watching and searching,

she at length obtained what she believed to be a clue to his home and name; then persuading the mother that the child would be better if taken to her own people for a while, and the mother consenting, the servant took it away; and that way led her to the very gates of Mr. Eyre, the man through whose instrumentality the woman he had once loved, stands charged with murder as a felon, in the dock to-day.

“But placed on a false scent by the information that she had gathered in the village, and faint with fasting and fatigue, the servant repented of her plan, and creeping away, sat down to rest herself by the pool, of whose curious history she was ignorant. As night drew on, the child cried for food, but she had

none to give it, and in a moment of madness laid the baby down by the pool and walked away, thinking that some one would find it, but returned a few moments later to find that it had rolled itself over the brink, and disappeared.

“She sat there all that night—God knows what agonies that woman endured through those awful hours; but when day broke, she crept away homewards, and after walking an incredible distance, enduring all sorts of hardships, she reached her foster-sister, who, running to her with outstretched arms to seize the child, was met with the one single word—dead !

“For alas! the mother’s heart, to all appearance so indifferent, had awakened in her during the servant’s absence, and only

when she knew that her baby was dead—had died of diphtheria on his way home, did she fully realise the happiness that might have been hers had she kept him beside her. When her servant conducted her to a supposititious grave, she fell down beside it insensible, and for days and weeks was incapable of movement or thought; but when she came to herself, a fixed monomania possessed her—to discover in the ranks of the living such a child as her own might have been, had he lived. But nowhere could she find such an one, though she sought him far and wide.

“Think of the horror of the situation—of the servant knowing herself to be in deed if not in heart, a murderess—think of these two lonely women dwelling with

that awful secret between them for years and years, till one morning, in the corner of a country newspaper, the servant read how by the drying up of the Shifting Pool in the village of Lovel, the skeleton of a very young child had been discovered; proved by medical evidence to have lain there upwards of five years.

“An awful fear seized her lest the mother should hear of the discovery, and drawn by a dreadful fascination to the spot, she gathered a little money together, and without a word to her mistress, walked every step of the way to Lovel.

“When she reached the fatal pool, the place was deserted, but as she sat there in a state of stupor, born of inanition and despair, a labourer passed, and she recognised his face at once, as he re-

cognised hers. He had spoken to her five years before, when she had sat by the pool with the baby on her knee.

“As he stared at her, open-mouthed, Mr. Eyre rode up, and, hearing the man’s stammering exclamations, drew the truth from him, and, without a moment’s hesitation, as magistrate, committed the woman to prison. She did not know him, either by sight or name, nor did she bear him any malice—her one hope was that her mistress might be prevented from knowing the truth, and so she gave a false name, and pleaded guilty, only anxious that she might die before Hester Clarke, by chance, should hear of the trial, and, suspecting who the prisoner might be come in search of her.

“She was found guilty in due course ;

but the description of her person in the papers, coupled with the fact of her sudden disappearance, excited her mistress's suspicions, and she set out at once, reaching the prison the day after sentence had been passed upon her foster-sister.

“Of that terrible meeting between the two women, when the mother knew herself to have been robbed of all that had made life dear, by the hand of the only creature on earth who had loved her, I will not speak. Let us rather study the conduct of the accused afterwards, and see if she displays that revengeful, cruel disposition, which could alone account for the murder she was afterwards supposed to commit.

“Does she thrust her unhappy servant

from her—does she leave her alone, face to face with the horrors of the fate to which she is sentenced? Does she tell into the many eager ears around her, the truth about the man who lives honoured and respected with her rival, up at the house yonder?

“No! she remains with this poor wretch—she soothes her in those last days, so rapidly approaching their frightful end—she confesses that *she* is the mother, thereby hoping to divert to her own head some of her servant's guilt—she moves heaven and earth to obtain a reprieve, and, failing that, a remission of the sentence to one of penal servitude for life; and when at length the respite comes—a respite delayed to the last moment, because the efforts of Mr. Eyre

against it have well-nigh succeeded—she receives the merciful intelligence with her arms clasped about the unhappy woman who has consummated her misery.

“Then, when the poor felon had departed to expiate *his* sin in a living death more awful than utter extinction, bereft of her last, her only hope, what shall this poor stranger do? She has but to open her lips, to blare aloud a few pregnant words, and all will shrink away from the man whom now they delight to honour, the young wife’s happiness will be withered, the young children’s opening lives overshadowed, *his* peace as utterly broken as *her* happiness was by him half a dozen years ago. By accident she finds her-

self in the presence of the wife, but does not speak, though Lord Lovel (who has long known the truth), believing her about to do so, interposes, and takes upon himself the guilt belonging to her husband, and in this transparent fiction the woman before you quietly acquiesced, and stood dumbly by to see her rival honoured, left in the possession of husband, home, and children; while *she*, poor outcast, despised by man, if not by God, stood at his gates hungering for the crumbs of bread that fell from the rich man's table.

“How much native goodness, how much nobility of soul, did she not display in thus permitting the happiness to continue that she could wither at a word? She lingers, and lingers yet; and why?

A beautiful little child, such a child as hers might have been had he lived—the child of the man she loved—crosses her path; she trembles, and is subjugated; she clasps him to her bosom, and loves him as well as a better woman might have done, as passionately as if he had been her own little living lad; and one by one parts with her cherished jewels, gifts of the man who once loved her, that by conciliating his nurse she may enjoy the child's company. And the little one loved her; he knew not the wrongs that his father had committed against her, and for a little while we may suppose this poor tortured heart had found peace at last, and that love had cast out the bitterness she had been more than human did

she not feel. But long ere this, her betrayer knows her presence, trembles at her power, and offers her golden bribes to leave him unmolested in his Eden; but she has no power to move; she is chained to the spot by her love for his child; her soul is wrapped up in him, so that she will see him by stealth, creeping out of sight like a thing accursed when the wife, in all the panoply of her pride and happiness, passes by, and so remains silent—silent always to the very end! It is not on her soul that she has stolen one moment from the five years of unrivalled happiness that fell to Mrs. Eyre's lot; suspicion never dimmed, anxiety never bowed for a moment that radiant spirit now departed, which lived and died happy.

though there dwelt at her very side what could have made her the most wretched of created beings by the utterance of a few words. Even her death was happy in its suddenness; how much more happy than the agonising death in life of that other, who had gone through every bitter phase of disillusionment and heart-break before she had reached the crowning misery of her position in the Court that day !

“ But this death of her happy rival, how was it compassed, by whom carried out ? Could anyone for a moment believe that it was conceived and executed by a woman whose scheme from the first moment, and even in the agonies of a bereavement that might have set at

defiance all dictates of policy, had been that of moderation and forbearance?

“Her presence at the Red Hall on the night of the murder was to be accounted for on purely natural grounds. By the nurse’s own confession, these unauthorised visits had been connived at, even purchased, by the hoarded jewels that one by one the accused had parted with to secure her favour, and that midnight call was only one out of a hundred others in which no especial motive was likely to lurk.

“He would offer his own explanation of that night’s work, based partly on fact, and partly on the foregoing events that, in the common order of things, would lead to certain results.”

(It was here observed that the prisoner,

who had hitherto regarded him restlessly, and much as a clairvoyant, who speaks but her inmost secrets, here sprang up and spread out her hands with a gesture as of repudiation.)

“On that night, then, she had left her lodging to take a good-night kiss of her darling in his bed, certain that at this hour Mrs. Eyre would have retired to rest, and the master of the house be engaged below on those studies that had lately absorbed him. For she knew, as no other did, that her idol had for months past been growing more and more delicate; that which the mother’s eye had failed to perceive, the poor out-cast saw quickly enough; and so she was stealing, in darkness and secrecy, to know him safe; when, unfortunately,

Lord Lovel, just then leaving the house, caught sight of her vanishing figure, and, impelled by some instinct of fear, followed.

“He discovered nothing; for, with that sense of shame at her own position that had throughout distinguished her, she had slipped behind an open door, and only on the disappearance of her pursuer into an inner room, noiselessly kissed her darling, and made her escape.

“Gentlemen, how shall I now venture to approach a subject that, while seeming far-fetched, is literally true to nature? When she ran out and down the stone steps that led to the garden, a brightly shining light on the opposite wing attracted her attention, and looking wistfully at that little beacon which indicated

so much, insensibly she drew nearer till her foot struck against a ladder placed against the wall beneath it. A sudden impulse—mad, foolish, if you will, but natural—bade her ascend it, and look in unsuspected for a moment on the happy rival who rested securely within, with peaceful heart, happy in all this poor creature lacked, but in which, long ago, she had, perhaps, fondly hoped to be rich.

“With what fear and trembling does she mount step by step; how cautiously, when she has reached the topmost rung, does she raise her head to look in. But what is this! I will tell you what she sees. Though, faithful to her noble policy to the last, she will not speak in her own defence, I say that she sees——”

(Here the prisoner started up in wild excitement, and cried out, passionately—
“I saw nothing—he can’t know—I never told him a word!”)

“She sees,” resumed her counsel, who had admirably maintained his force during the interruption, “no happy rival, but a woman in whose breast is at that moment being plunged the knife of the assassin; and forgetful of danger to herself, she forces her way through the window to clutch the knife from his hand, but he stabs at her violently; then, when she has wrested it from him, he escapes, and she is left alone with the proof of murder in her hand.

“As she gazes at the bleeding, unconscious victim, a sudden sense of her own awful danger assails her; she does not

pause to summon help, but hiding the knife in her pocket, she forces herself through the aperture of the window, leaving behind her the scrap of torn clothing to which so much importance has been attached.

“Half crazed by the shock that the gardener’s unsuspected presence at the foot of the ladder communicates to her; appalled by the hideous knowledge that she carries in her breast; in a panic of utterly unreasoning fear, she rushes away—on and on—the dreadful scene ever before her—all that night and part of the next day; penniless, starving, hounded from every house as a common vagrant, till on the second day common sense returned to her.

“She thought of her darling, and of

how lonely and wretched he must be with none to soothe him in his loss, and only hirelings to guard him from mischief; and painfully dragged herself back to the Red Hall, only to find that her idolised little lad lay at the point of death, waited upon by Lord Lovel, who had fondly loved him.

“‘*I have loved him best!*’ she cried; ‘give him to *me!*’ And at daybreak the child died in her arms, stretching out his hands to her, and thinking she was his mother. As she sate, stony and numbed, with the dead child across her knees, Mr. Eyre entered with the officers of the law, and bade them seize her for the murder of his wife.

“When they dragged her away she made no resistance; it was only her body that

they took—her heart remained behind with the older image of her drowned child; nor even in that desperate moment, when face to face with her accuser, did she upbraid or denounce him, and in gaol she would not answer a single question as to what passed on the night of the murder; his own instructions, as counsel for her defence, being derived from other lips, since she would not open her own to defend herself.”

(A curious expression, almost amounting to a grimace, was observed to flit across Mr. Eyre’s features at this speech; but Frank looked down, feeling as though he had betrayed his friend.)

“And now I have to ask you, if it is probable that the accused, if guilty, would have uttered a cry to rouse the

whole household, and so bring it to seize her red-handed? Or, having escaped by a hair's-breadth, have boldly returned two days later to the very scene of the murder, knowing that her flight had attracted public attention?

“That flight, the most damning proof of all against her, was simply the effect of panic—the unreasoning, headlong panic, that will impel even a strong man to run away from the sight of a shocking deed—a panic from which, once recovered, she made her way back to the very spot that she would have shunned, like the plague, had she been a guilty woman!

“I say that she did not commit the murder; that the whole tenor of her life and character—merciful and humane

—forbids the thought ; but that her policy throughout has been to shield the real murderer, one who is even here present—a man who, in a moment of mad jealousy against his friend, slew the woman he loved, and then strove to cast the guilt on the woman who loved him. I say, gentlemen of the jury, that I demand the acquittal of this woman, on the ground that the charge against her is not proved ; and in her place, and in the interests of justice, to place at the bar the real murderer, who had a motive for the crime that the prisoner had not.”

(The judge frowned ; the jury, unused to romance-reading, gaped ; the opposing counsel smiled ; through the Court a rustle, as of a light wind among autumn leaves, ran, and none looked at the

prisoner, who was struggling for breath, and gazing at her advocate as if she could have slain him, but at Mr. Eyre, who was calm with the strength in which there is no effort, the wild insinuation seeming to recoil on the speaker, like a wave dashed backwards from a granite cliff. The next moment Hester's champion had regained his courage, and pressed onward before there was time to receive the reprimand he expected.)

"It had been said that there was a motive for the crime, and this motive had been declared to be jealousy; and this was true enough. The murder *had* been committed through that ignoble passion, but not by the prisoner.

"It would be necessary to remind the jury of those facts that had long been

public talk—the ruptured engagement of the deceased lady with Lord Lovel, her intimacy with him on his return, her well-known elopement with him from the White House, and Mr. Eyre's pursuit of the runaway couple, overtaking them before they had gone any farther than Lovel. He had, at the time, affected to treat the matter as a joke, and had bid Lord Lovel to his house as usual; but it was observed by many that a great change was perceptible in him from that time, and he even neglected those magisterial duties that he had formerly fulfilled so ably, to all appearance disliking to meet his equals. Mr. Eyre was a very proud man—one who made laws, was not governed by them—and it was only natural to suppose that, as time went on,

and he found his young wife less and less a companion to him, he should become jealous of the brilliant young man who, in looks, age, and spirits, was so much more a fitting mate for her than himself.

“On the night of the murder, it was clear that he had left the two together, then placed himself where he could be an auditor of all that passed ; and, by a most unfortunate mischance, it occurred that they were conversing in a way that to the gardener sounded like ‘courting,’ and to him may have had a more sinister significance, as he reseated himself at his table, his head resting on his outstretched arms in the attitude in which Lord Lovel had seen him when he looked through the window.

“ It was to be conjectured that, stung to a jealous madness—a second Othello in his jealousy, as she a Desdemona in her innocence. *Some one* had ascended to Mrs. Eyre’s apartment, and struck at her the blow that was her death.

“ It would be found entirely consistent with the prisoner’s former conduct that, while accidentally present at the deed—nay, while she even struggled to avert it—she should be bent on hiding the fact from every living soul, and escape hurriedly before there could be a chance of her being called upon to relate what she had seen. The shriek that escaped her, had been at the horrible sensation she experienced on feeling the presence of some person at the foot of the ladder; and if she had fought wildly, it

had not been for fear on her own account, but on that of another person. The evidence of the man Digges as to the precise moment in which he heard the scream, was confused, and not to be trusted; his potations in the kitchen having muddled his wits, so that he was not able to swear if the cry preceded, or followed, his grip of the ladder.

“And now to examine the evidence that had been offered of her wish to steal the child of the deceased; could a more improbable time possibly have been selected than that of nigh upon midnight; and in what way could the mother, retired to rest in the opposite wing, have hindered that plan, or interfered with it? She had unrestricted access to him, could have carried him away at any hour of the

day she willed ; and it was inconceivable that she should have chosen this hour of the night to drag from his warm bed, the little lad that she so passionately loved.

“There are motives of jealousy which instigate men and women to the commission of murder, of hatred and revenge, of avarice and plunder, that may spur them on to deeds of wickedness ; but, as to the prisoner, what motive of hatred had she to Mrs. Eyre ? By her successful rival’s death she gained nothing—the ashes upon a stone-cold hearth were not colder than the heart of the man who had made her his toy, and crushed her under foot. The child’s love was already hers, and should she forfeit that by a deed foreign to every natural trait that she had hitherto shown ?

The idea was preposterous, when all her antecedents had gone to prove that she regarded with love and pity the woman who had supplanted her ! ”

“ That is true ”—and a woman’s voice rang through the Court—“ I loved her, and she loved me ; the very day she died, she kissed me ”

It was from the prisoner at the bar that those few passionate words came ; and the judge, eyeing the jury carefully, knew that an effect had been produced on them that it would be difficult to undo.

Mr. Eyre started violently at Hester’s words, then shook his head, and stood a statue of incredulity that tempered the excitement of those who glanced at him ; he was in himself so

impregnable, that these words floating about him were light as wind.

But when Nature speaks, man stops to hearken; and her simplest words are truth, while his utmost arguments are sophistries.

“Gentlemen of the jury,” cried Hester’s counsel, seizing his golden opportunity, “I leave this sorely tried, helpless woman in your hands, certain that you will show justice, and, if you have human hearts in your breasts, mercy towards one who has been most inhumanly treated. To you it is given to quench for ever the light of this noble soul, or to permit her a little space of existence upon earth, in which to repent the one thoughtless sin of her youth. As fathers, brothers, husbands, your

every chivalrous instinct must be roused on behalf of this woman, who has been pursued by so immoderate a hatred on the part of the man to whom she has sacrificed herself so splendidly ; and if her reticence from one look or word that could criminate him does not stir you to that admiration and sympathy that a noble deed, finely persisted in, must evoke from every heart, then you are not fitted to judge of the rapidly moving drama of passions that this extraordinary case has revealed.

“ Gentlemen, — mine has been a hazardous and awful task, but one far more awful lies before you, for upon its issue hangs that which may either haunt you to the remainder of your life, thrusting itself between you and

the faces of your fellow-men, and condemning you before the judgment-seat of God, in that you have lightly destroyed a human soul; or your conviction of the innocence of the woman before you, will find tongue in a verdict that, in your dying hours, will return to you as a memory that shall smooth the path which leads you to your Maker!"

CHAPTER V.

O Heaven ! it is mysterious, it is awful to consider, that we not only carry each a future ghost within him, but are in very deed, ghosts !

DARKNESS had crept over the Court before Mr. Valentine had ceased to speak, the scarlet canopy above the judge's head had turned black, and even the ladies' bonnets were swallowed up in the gloom. The officials had neglected to bring lights, and it was impossible to perceive what effect this speech, that traversed all rules of legal etiquette, had produced on prisoner, judge, and jury.

Suddenly, almost in the moment of his

voice ceasing, and before even a hum of exclamation could arise from the body of the Court, a hubbub without spoke of some new excitement in connection with the trial; and a moment later, preceded by an usher who bore lights, a man—ragged, unshorn, and reckless-looking—entered the Court.

He did not wait to be addressed, but boldly said that he had come to give important evidence about the murder, and the sooner he was sworn the better.

His appearance was the finishing stroke to the day's surprises, and even the judge, who had been in a state of moral shock ever since Mr. Eyre's self-denouncement, leaned forward to look earnestly at the man.

Duly sworn, he gave his evidence as follows :

He was a tramp, and could neither read nor write. Did not often trouble himself about other folks' business, though often enough they troubled themselves about his. On the whole, he thought he would rather be in gaol than out of it — leastways in winter time, when there were no fresh buds and things to smell at, and make a man forget his stomach.

He had been on the tramp now for three weeks, but two days ago, when at forty miles distance from Lovel, he had heard some gipsies talking about a murder that had been committed at that place on a certain night, and how a woman had been arrested on suspicion

of it. That made him think of something he had seen on passing through the village that very night, and it went against his conscience to let a woman be hanged for what she hadn't done—tramps had got consciences sometimes—there was no tax yet on that commodity, or maybe he couldn't afford the luxury. Well, he had tramped all the way back, and hoped he'd come in time. It seemed a largish sort of company to be got together to try and hang one woman.

Brought sharply back to the evidence he had volunteered, he deposed to the following:

Late in the afternoon preceding the murder, he had passed through the village of Lovel, and between five and six, having begged unsuccessfully at half

a dozen doors, he struck out across Syngé Lane, for a house he knew of, where the servants would give him a crust of bread and a drink of beer.

But a bright light shining from a cottage attracted his attention, and he drew near the window, meaning to look in, when it gave him a turn to see close beside him a man who held a pistol pointed at something, or somebody inside the room. He got behind him and looked in. A woman—a real beauty—was sitting just inside, and seemed to have dropped asleep in her chair; she had on something loose and white, and looked as happy as a new-born babe.

He was just lifting his hand to knock the pistol from the man's hand, when the latter dropped it by his side, and without

looking round, or perceiving him, moved away.

He didn't follow—where was the good? Thought it was a bit of jealousy belike, and it's ill work meddling between a man and his woman.

Thought no more of it till the gipsies said a woman had been murdered that night at Lovel, and blamed himself for not having run after the man who had been practising-like, as it seemed, when witness saw him, but later on had come back, and actually killed her.

The tramp's face was a study of amazement and disbelief when he was told that no murder was committed in Synge Lane that night, and that the woman he had seen threatened, stood in the dock before him on the charge of having murdered

the mistress of the Red Hall, over a mile distant.

The tramp stared stupidly, then exclaimed that it was "mortal queer." For his own part, he shouldn't wonder if the man he'd seen practising at murder hadn't gone up to the Hall, and done it in sober earnest—one woman being very like another, and having once got his hand in, perhaps he wasn't particular as to his game, so long as he brought down something.

Asked if he thought he could recognise the man again, and requested to glance round the Court in search of him (for by now it was fairly lit), the tramp's gaze wandered vaguely over the sea of faces, and he shook his head. He was sorry he had come back, he said—he had done no

good—and in future he would let his conscience slide, for it brought him more plague than profit.

At the conclusion of his evidence, the Court adjourned until the following day at ten o'clock, and rapidly emptied, the prevailing impression of astonishment being too keen to permit of more than mere broken exclamations. Not even by the following morning would the revelations of that day be fully digested.

As Mr. Eyre left the Court, he came face to face with the tramp, who lingered, scanning the features of those who came out.

“Have you ever seen me before, my man?” said Mr. Eyre, who stood in a strong light.

The tramp looked hard at him, then away.

“I couldn’t see his face,” he said sullenly; “but you’re about his height. But what was her that’s murdered, to you?”

“My wife.”

The man lifted his shoulders suddenly—he had got a clue. Over-much love, or over-much hate, these were the causes of half the murders upon earth, especially between husbands and wives.

As Mr. Eyre passed on, some one behind leaned forward, and whispered in the tramp’s ear.

CHAPTER VI.

“**H**OW did Hester Clarke’s counsel get all that extraordinary evidence together in her favour?” exclaimed Frank, when with Mr. Eyre they stood waiting for the horses without.

“O! I told him,” said Mr. Eyre carelessly. “When I left you at the inn, I caught him in the very nick of time, and told him every circumstance, including all you’d told *me*—everything that I could remember, to damn myself, and clear *her*. In short, I coached him, laid stress on myself as a villain; not that there is a chance of saving her,

but she shall have fair-play. And, upon my word, the defence was ingenious; that attempt to fix the murder on me was an inspiration that deserves success."

But Frank shook his head; he felt that the popular indignation was violently excited against Mr. Eyre, and by no means felt sure of the issue of the morrow.

"Strange that I did not see the man in Synge Lane that night," said Mr. Eyre abruptly, as they rode away; "for I *did* think of killing the woman. The demon of murder *was* abroad that night; but it slew the innocent, not the guilty."

Frank, plunged deep into a tragedy at war with his whole nature, remained silent. There seemed no light anywhere, and he had a dreadful consciousness of

something unexplored—terrible—in Mr. Eyre's breast that forbade confidence.

The two parted, as usual, at the gates of the Towers; but Mr. Eyre did not on this occasion immediately climb the steep path that led to the Hall; he turned aside, and sought the church-yard, in which all that was best in him lay.

He tethered his horse without, and entered it in the murky darkness of a chill November night, and finding his way by instinct to that narrow dwelling-place of her body, he kneeled down beside it.

As he stretched out his arms to the cold sod, they met some human substance that made him recoil.

But the next moment he advanced,

and seized something that struggled out of his grasp, crying passionately—

“She isn’t yours ; she’s *mine* ! ”

It was Doune’s voice that spoke, and as Mr. Eyre struck a light he saw his first-born, standing at a few paces distance, clutching something white and shadowy to his boyish breast.

A sudden thrill told Mr. Eyre that this was Madcap’s baby, the child of whom he had never even thought till now ; and as the wax-light died out in darkness he strode forward, and snatching that little bundle from Doune’s arms, folded it within his cloak, and turned away.

But at a little distance he heard a stifled cry, and paused to listen—

“Mother! mother! you asked me to

be kind to the baby, to take care of her ;
but father's taken her away and
Josephine doesn't mind when she cries
. . . . I would like to *die* with you. . . ."

As Mr. Eyre lifted the little struggling
body from its damp bed, for the first time
he realised that the loss of his Madcap
might be as irreparable an one to others
as himself.

When he walked into the nursery,
dripping with the November night-dews,
and the two children nestled beneath
his cloak, Josephine started up in fear ;
though when he had given them over to
her, he departed without a word or look
to that part of the house in which he
had dwelt with Madcap.

But Josephine, giving back the babe
into the arms of its affrighted nurse

who for hours had sought it, bade the woman guard it better in future, since the master of the house had chosen to recognise its existence; then with a shuddering glance around, put up her hand to those magnificent plaits of hair which had imperceptibly increased in bulk during the past fortnight.

A superb crown of plaits on a woman's head could scarcely hide a visible secret, yet it was curious that even at night Josephine did not unfasten them, but at dawn, and with locked doors, rose to dress her hair for the day.

CHAPTER VII.

“And feel I, Death, no joy from thought of thee?”

AT half-past ten o'clock next morning (in a Court so inconceivably crowded that more than one woman fainted, and several slight accidents occurred), there being no witnesses to be called on behalf of the prisoner, the judge proceeded to sum up the evidence at considerable length.

Having lain stress on the prisoner's evident wish to avoid being seen at the Red Hall on the night of the murder, he drew attention to the positive proof

of her having entered Mrs. Eyre's room, that the scrap of torn clothing afforded ; to the fact of the blood-stained knife that had undoubtedly committed the crime being found in her possession ; to her extraordinary silence (save for an involuntary cry of terror when confronted by the gardener), and her disappearance from the neighbourhood for the space of two days and nights.

The defence set up by her counsel he would characterise as an ingenious theory that there was, unfortunately, not one jot or tittle of evidence to support ; as a sketch of what *might* have happened it was effective, but as the jury had to deal with facts, not guesses, the sooner they forgot that little bit of romance-reading the better.

The evidence of the tramp was another matter, and indirectly in her favour, as it pointed to the existence of some hitherto unsuspected person, who had gained access to Mrs. Eyre's room that night; though it was inconceivable, if such were the case, that the prisoner should so immediately obtain possession of the instrument of the murder, and preserve so inflexible a silence as to the inhuman deed committed on a lady she professed to have deeply loved.

The jury must not permit themselves either to be influenced in her favour by the fact that she had for months resided in the village, and made no attempt to poison Mrs. Eyre's mind against her husband. Mr. Eyre had assured them that she had distinctly threatened to

harm his wife on the very day of the murder ; though motives of policy, and, doubtless, some regard for her reputation, had hitherto kept her silent, since she had all to lose, and nothing to gain, by declaring the truth.

The judge's summing-up lasted some twenty minutes longer, but was distinctly unfavourable to the prisoner ; possibly because he saw that more than half of the jurymen were strongly prejudiced in her favour. At a quarter to twelve they retired, and the judge left his seat to read the morning papers, half hoping that Mr. Eyre might join him ; for, as a man, his sympathy was entirely with his old friend, whom he did not consider more guilty than others, though decidedly more unfortunate.

But Mr. Eyre, in obedience to a scribbled note from the Duchess, had gone round to where she sate, and, in the grasp of her hand, met the first cordial support he had known for days. The Duchess's heart had thrilled at the evidence of Mr. Eyre's positive hatred of the prisoner ; he had not been so cold to *her*, and Madcap was dead.

The Duke received him coldly. Hester's behaviour in the dock had produced a profound impression on him, as on many others. He thought that in nobility she showed almost equally with Frank ; and his whole soul went forth in admiration to the young fellow whose self-sacrifice, heroically persisted in to the last, had ensured Madcap's happiness to the very end.

Mr. Eyre conversed on indifferent topics, asking some particulars as to the Duke's shooting, and inquiring of the Duchess what might be her plans for the winter.

She thought him very little altered by his loss, not knowing that strong excitement, and a certainty that Hester would be found guilty, and Madcap avenged, sustained him.

The first shock to this conviction came when the jury, at the end of half-an-hour, re-entered the Court.

The judge resumed his seat. Mr. Eyre unconsciously clenched his bare hand till blood sprang from the finger-nails, as the clerk put the usual question to the foreman of—

“Guilty, or not guilty?”

“ We can’t agree.”

“ Then you may retire,” said the judge, “ and the prisoner be removed, and brought up again for sentence ”— and angrily jerking his robes about him, he withdrew.

Mr. Eyre stood rigid, then, exclaiming, “ Dolts ! fools !—they can *hesitate* ! ” left the Duchess without a word.

Meanwhile Frank, who had caught from Hester, in the very act of removal, a look impossible to be misunderstood, had left the Court, and, after some difficulty, succeeded in obtaining an interview with her, limited to one quarter of an hour.

He found her walking swiftly to and fro, and was shocked at the haggardness of the face she turned upon him as he entered.

“They’re hesitating!” she said; “I didn’t think they would—but they may bring me in guilty, and it’s best to face it only it seems harder than I reckoned on and there’s her baby up there, and no mother to tend it—and if her death lies at my door for the wicked words I spoke to *him* that day, I’d like to live, and work it out but I understand now why Janet was so ready and willing to die when one’s blind tired, and got nothing worth waking up for, it’s natural to want to sleep but I shall be wanted, and *she* would have wished me to stop. I think you guessed it,” she went on, with a wan smile; “how I meant to steal my idol, and take him from his mother, and now God has stolen him,

and laid him in her arms it was only for a little while she was left without him."

"Hester!" he cried, "why won't you speak; clear yourself, for God's sake, if you are innocent—tell all that you know of that fatal night!"

"*If* I am innocent? You stayed away, but I never thought you believed me guilty. When you've loved someone dearly, and had a misunderstanding with her and made it up again, and kissed one another could you find it in your heart to kill her?" said Hester, with quivering lips. "I didn't mean to speak I'm just working it out—my wickedness in saying what I did to him she'd be alive now maybe but for that."

“What did you say to him?” cried Frank, seizing her arm, a horrible fear born of her looks and words, turning him pale as ashes. She tore herself away, and fell face downwards on the low pallet upon which she and Janet, through so many miserable hours, had sat side by side.

“I can’t speak,” she said at last; “I broke my word to her once, but I’ll never break the last vow I swore to her, that I’d never harm anything she loved; and I never will . . . I’d rather die than tell even *him*, much less you, the truth about the murder.”

“Then you know?” he said, scarcely breathing as he looked at her.

“After all, it’s best to die,” said Hester, in the same tone; “*she* won’t

torment me with questions for she doesn't know—she never shall” her voice dropped. “But there's Janet, she'll miss my letters and if the worst comes, you'll see that no one tells her”

Footsteps approached, the brief interview was nearly ended. As she sat erect and covered up her face, the door opened, and the turnkey appeared in the aperture.

It was the same man who had admitted Mr. Eyre to that interview with Janet that the condemned woman had demanded, and something familiar in the huddled up figure on the pallet, in Frank's expectant attitude as he turned away, smote the man's dull memory into life. He glanced back curiously

at Hester as he locked the door upon her.

There was a terrible question in Frank's eyes when next they met those of his friend, to which Mr. Eyre did not respond.

"What is it, Frank?" he said; "are you afraid these fools will take vengeance out of our hands after all? They daren't do it, or I'd move heaven and earth to reverse their decision. This hand," he added, looking at it, "it's clean yet, but I won't answer for its deeds if *she* lives, while Madcap is dead."

The day wore on, drew to its close, and the jury did not return.

Locked into a small room, without fire, food or candle—not having tasted food since morning—they passed the weary

hours in striving to convince one another.

Six were of one opinion, six of the opposite; the former half-dozen being guided by the judge's summing-up, and a profound respect for Mr. Eyre, the latter six by a variety of opinions, that included detestation of Mr. Eyre's moral character; pity and admiration for the accused; a strong suspicion that Digges had been too lightly released; a dark conviction that Mr. Eyre was the murderer himself, and that it was he whom the tramp had seen in Synge Lane; all these being reasons, supplemented by an emphatic one from the twelfth juror (who had lost a beloved wife in child-birth last year), that it was not murder at all, but one of those natural deaths to

which women succumb by the thousand every year, with no great fuss or outcry over the bitterest tragedy that life can furnish.

Perhaps the argument of the last juror, though weakest in itself, produced most effect on the opposing six, who were all married men, and had more than once gone through the dread and peril of seeing a beloved life at stake.

By degrees, first one was won over to the merciful side, then another; but the incorruptible one turned out to be a butcher, impervious alike to fear, cold and hunger, who, slapping his mighty thigh, declared that when facts are on your side, you don't need hysterics to convince people; and for his part, he was not going to be taken in by a lawyer

chap, who snivelled with one eye, and winked at one's greenness with the other.

Possibly when eleven men set themselves (at their very keenest, through hunger and cold) to persuade one man, and he a butcher, to whom eleven excellent customers are a matter of consideration, the result may be forecast; but it fell with the force of a thunderbolt on the Court, when at nine o'clock the jury returned.

As the judge entered, the prisoner appeared from the cells below, the clerk rose to ask if the jury were agreed, to which the foreman replied by a nervous but distinct

“Not guilty.”

A profound silence followed these words; then gradually a faint hum made

itself audible through the Court, that rapidly swelled to a swift, on-rolling wave of applause, that had reached its height when it was discovered that Mr. Eyre and Hester Clarke had simultaneously disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But it was even thou, my companion, my guide and mine old familiar friend . . ."

THE prison doors were open; Hester might walk out of them at her will, and with some vague idea of rest beyond, she had turned, and groped her way out, instinct guiding her to the great door that gave egress to the courtyard.

She did not know that without was assembled a vast crowd that reflected the division of opinion within, one-half of them believing her guilty, though acquitted; the other, and rougher portion,

to whom she had become the idol of the hour, being equally certain of her innocence.

A hoarse shout of welcome rent the air as she appeared in the doorway, and, dazed and trembling, gazed outward at the sea of faces upturned to her; and hesitating to plunge into it, did not perceive how Mr. Eyre himself stood behind her.

"My friends," said Hester, and stretched out her two thin hands imploringly, "I have dwelt among you and you have known me and that I am innocent of this crime."

"Innocent!" said a terrible voice in her ear; and she shrank back to see Mr. Eyre, cloaked and spurred, standing beside her, his eye gathering wrath and

coldness as he glanced contemptuously at the crowd before him.

As he spoke, a mingled storm of execration and welcome arose, and grew louder and louder as the two tides of popular feeling met with a rush and a roar that boded mischief both to accuser and accused.

“Let me pass, my men,” said Mr. Eyre, as he pushed his way out; and some made way, but others came thronging about him with threatening looks; and he found himself pushed, hustled, tossed this way and that, his strength a mere nothing against the solid weight of the masses around him.

It would be difficult to say who struck the first blow, or hurled the first missile, but in a few minutes the courtyard was

turned into a writhing mass of infuriated men and women, who struck out indiscriminately; and it was from one of his own tenants that Mr. Eyre received a blow on the head that, at the time, he scarcely even noticed.

He reached his horse at last, mounted it, and rode slowly home. Frank found him, a quarter of an hour later, sitting in his wife's room. He was pulseless and cold, blood oozing from a fracture of the skull.

For a month Frank never left him; but on the first day that Mr. Eyre was able to ask a rational question, he inquired for his friend. He was told that Lord Lovel had set out an hour ago for abroad, and that his return was uncertain.

On Mr. Eyre asking if he had left no message, he was told there was none; but a few days later a sealed letter was placed in his hand. The handwriting was Frank's.

"God help you!" it ran. "I know the truth. Do not attempt to follow me. I will never of my own free will look upon your face again.

"FRANK LOVEL."

* * * * *

Mr. Eyre read this letter through and through, then asked if Hester Clarke had left the village, and was told that she had done so on the day succeeding her acquittal. He then sent for Job, who came unwillingly, and denied all knowledge of his master's movements; and this was true enough, for Frank had left

the place in a state bordering on madness, and with no idea of his future plans.

A week later, Mr. Eyre having set his house in order, and made all arrangements for a lengthened absence, departed from the Red Hall, no one knew whither; though as years passed, and neither of the men returned, it was conjectured that they were together, seeking, in a life of perpetual adventure, to escape the memory of the woman they had both so deeply loved.

But those who knew Mr. Eyre well said that his story was not half done, nor the tragedy of Madcap's death yet played out to its bitter end; and these waited, with a breathless expectancy that even time could not dull, for the lifting of the curtain upon the last scene.

And, meanwhile, two unconsidered, fresh young lives were growing up at the Red Hall; but there was no living soul to tell Mr. Eyre that, if he had laid one treasure beneath the sod, there existed for him other priceless ones above it.

THE END.

THE BURLINGTON:

A HIGH-CLASS

Monthly Magazine.

EDITED BY HELEN B. MATHERS.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

A few Opinions of the Press, taken from over
Seven Hundred favourable Notices:—

"THE BURLINGTON, a new venture of that popular novelist Miss Helen Mathers, may claim, though only half the price, to rank with many of our shilling magazines. Not only fiction, but science, literature, art, fashion, and sanitation, will all in turn be represented in its columns, and quarterly prizes will stimulate the wits and reward the assiduity of 'the constant subscriber.'"—*The Graphic*.

"THE BURLINGTON is 'a new high-class monthly magazine,' edited by Helen B. Mathers, and promising remarkably well. There is a considerable diversity of subject, and we are glad to see that the articles are not of wearisome length. Among the more directly instructive papers, we find 'Irish Story and Song.' By an unfortunate blunder, 'At the Scam Gate' is headed 'At the Scam Gate,' and the error runs through the article. Other subjects are 'Fashions and Follies,' 'A Niece of Mazarin: the Duchess of Bouillon,' and 'The Romance of Surgery.'"—*The Queen*.

"THE BURLINGTON is a large sixpennyworth. It contains ninety-six pages—sixteen pages more than the *Argosy*—is printed on good paper, in new type, and on the cover has Helen B. Mather's name as editor, which is a sufficient guarantee of the care bestowed on the selection of the contents. We cordially call the attention of our readers to this venture, and wish it every success."—*Society*.

"Miss Mathers, the popular authoress of 'Comin' thro' the Rye,' appears in the capacity of editor of a new magazine, THE BURLINGTON, moderate in price and creditable in substance. Besides Miss Mathers' own novel, 'The Story of a Sin,' we remark some extremely elegant verses to an infant, by Mr. Frederick Locker, and 'Faithful,' a pathetic little sketch in prose by Mr. Philip Marston."—*Illustrated London News*.

PRESS OPINIONS OF "THE BURLINGTON."

"A marvellous sixpennyworth, equal to many shilling magazines, and only half the price. Matter, paper, print, are all good, and this new venture certainly merits, and should as certainly attain, success. It far excels any sixpenny of which we are cognisant."—*Alltringham Paper*.

"THE BURLINGTON, a new venture, opens with a story by the editor (Miss Helen Mathers), which promises to excite and interest her readers, who, seeing that they are offered a tale by the authoress of 'Comin' thro' the Rye,' and a number of very readable articles in prose and verse by other hands, for the small sum of 6d., ought to be numerous. 'The Story of a Sin!' Many sins have got no stories that can be told, but Miss Mathers sets about the early biography of this particular, mysterious, and unguessable offence in her first number with a precision and clearness which make the reader anxious for the next instalment, and inspire a pleasing confidence that it will be all worth reading."—*The Army and Navy Gazette*.

"The contents are varied and interesting, and so attractive has this new venture proved, that already a second edition has been called for."—*The Rock*.

"The magazine is charming; the very thing for a drawing-room table."—*Fact*.

"Under the editorial care of the talented authoress, Miss Helen Mathers, we are presented with a new promising monthly magazine. We feel assured that, on the principle of the survival of the fittest, THE BURLINGTON will not merely hold its place, but will take deep root in the public favour."—*York House Papers*.

"There can be but little doubt there is ample room for a first-class sixpenny magazine. Under these circumstances THE BURLINGTON, ably presided over by Miss Helen Mathers, supported by a strong and talented staff of well-known writers, is sure to prove a success."—*The Foreign Times*.

"THE BURLINGTON seems likely to be an enduring success. In the February number Mr. Barnett Smith has a second paper on 'Irish Story and Song,' and Miss Alice Corkran contributes an interesting story entitled 'A Young Philistine.' We imagine Miss Helen Mathers herself enlightens us as to 'Fashions and Follies.'"—*Figaro*.

"THE BURLINGTON for the current month opens with Miss Helen B. Mathers' capitally told 'Story of a Sin,' the plot of which commences to show signs of a most exciting development. Mr. George Barnett Smith, whose place among critical English writers is widely recognised, also contributes an article on 'Irish Story and Song,' which is well worth perusal. Shirley Smith's 'My Lodging is on the Cold Ground,' and George Barlow's 'The Child,' are interesting contributions. The rest of the contents comprise a series of well-written and readable essays, papers, and chatty articles, among the best of which may be mentioned 'Fashions and Follies' and 'Burlington Babble.' Miss Mathers is evidently sparing no pains to make her magazine one of the best of the day."—*Sportsman*.





